

April 28, 2016

TOMPKINS COUNTY
Criminal Justice/Alternatives to
Incarceration Advisory Board

TOMPKINS REENTRY PROGRAM

PLAN BACKGROUND

In February 2015, the Criminal Justice/Alternatives to Incarceration Board (CJATI) formed the Reentry Subcommittee (RES) following recommendations that arose from the Jail Task Force meetings that took place in 2013-2014. The committee studied a myriad of factors that contribute to recidivism and unsuccessful reentry into the community following release from incarceration. The committee discovered that successful reentry programs for inmates rely on more than just helping the formerly incarcerated find jobs; it also requires helping offenders change their attitudes and beliefs about crime, addressing mental health and housing issues, providing mentoring, offering educational opportunities and job training, and connecting them with community resources. Most, if not all, of these things can and should begin as long before a person's release date as possible.

Tompkins County recognized an existing need for such services and initiated a reentry pilot project at the Tompkins County Jail nearly eight years ago, which initially involved a multitude of community stakeholders, but now only continues today with the participation of a member of DSS, Probation, OAR and a Corrections Officer at the Jail. Inmates in the current project receive:

- Public Assistance the day after they are released since their DSS applications are completed and submitted 45 days prior to release. (This is also done for additional inmates by OAR);
- Transportation to DSS from the Tompkins County Jail for an intake appointment, provided by an officer of the jail; and
- Assessment for additional needs such as housing, education, employment, substance abuse and mental health counseling, SSI/SSD, legal issues and are referred to appropriate agencies or assisted by members of the reentry program.

As there was no dedicated funding for this pilot program and eligibility was limited to a small pool of candidates that could be successfully managed given staffing constraints, only 143 individuals have been served since inception of the program. However, the data indicates that of the 143 people served, 92 or 64.3% have not returned to the Tompkins County Jail, indicating

that re-entry interventions, as limited as they were, may have been effective at reducing recidivism and are worthy of further expansion and support. The Tompkins County Legislature, in September 2015, made a commitment to provide that support by setting aside funding in the amount of \$100,000 for this endeavor.

In the Reentry Subcommittee report, it was identified that a designated coordinator or point person was lacking in the current reentry program. Currently, there is no one agency or nonprofit that has the resources, the authority, and the experience to undertake this job. The CJATI Board is comprised of 22 members, the majority of whom are members of the community or various nonprofit agencies providing services to those involved in the court system. Included are the judiciary, probation, DSS, victim representative, jail administrator, former offender, substance abuse treatment providers, mental health services, assigned counsel and defense attorney, among others, and represents every spoke in the criminal justice wheel. Thus, the CJATI Board has the ability, authority, desire and experience to reduce recidivism through assessment, coordination and referral to needed services, as well as analyze data.

CJATI determined that the highest priority for funding is the hiring of one overarching coordinator, designated specifically to organize reentry services for inmates of the County jail. The rich resources and cumulative knowledge of the Board can assist the Reentry Coordinator with the mission and goals of the program. The Reentry Coordinator would be responsible for assessing risk of recidivism and needs of inmates, and would strategically apply resources to those identified most in need of services so as to improve a successful transition into the community. The Reentry Coordinator would involve community stakeholders to further strategize solutions to identified system barriers. The Coordinator would be responsible for establishing a collaborative effort with numerous agencies and initiatives, including OAR and URO (Ultimate Reentry Opportunity*) to determine possible areas of crossover and divergence that could benefit all reentry participants. The Reentry Coordinator would attend and report to the CJATI Board on a monthly basis and report out as requested.

As an elemental part of the Reentry Program, and as a means to ensure the maximum impact from public and philanthropic investments in reentry services, CJATI will collaborate and coordinate with URO, OAR and others. It is expected that less formal, ad hoc connections will regularly occur as reentry problems and opportunities are identified.

The following plan and vision has been completed to formalize a sequence of action steps in the County's reentry plan. It should be noted that in Tompkins County, approximately 60% of the jail population is awaiting trial or sentencing (presentenced) and 40% are sentenced, generally serving less than one year. Average length of stay in our local jail for unsentenced inmates is only 37 days, leaving little time or capacity to assess and provide expansive services prior to release. While more extensive services will be able to be provided to the sentenced population, all inmates will have an initial screening and be triaged for referral to services if desired.

* URO is a separate reentry initiative funded by private dollars and sponsored by the Multicultural Resource Center of Ithaca. URO seeks to identify barriers to successful reentry and engage individuals and organizations, including members of CJATI, who are key to addressing and attempting to eliminate those barriers. To guarantee ongoing communication and collaboration, the executive director of the MRC has been added to CJATI as a voting member.

OUTLINE OF REENTRY PLAN

MISSION STATEMENT

It is the mission of the Tompkins ReEntry Program to provide transitional services to incarcerated individuals returning to the Tompkins County community from our jail, with the goal of reducing recidivism and improving public safety through the use of evidence-based practices, pre- and post-release guidance, and financial, employment, educational and housing services.

PHASE 1 HIRE OR CONTRACT FOR AN EXPERIENCED REENTRY COORDINATOR TO:

- A. Provide in-reach to incarcerated inmates, offer program services, and conduct risk- and needs-assessment for those willing to be in the program.
- B. Identify clients for the reentry program based on level of risk and needs. Level of services are based on a continuum -- more resources are applied to those highest in risk and need.
- C. Discharge planning to coordinate needs with services, and make referral to needed services
 - a. Substance abuse treatment
 - b. Mental health treatment
 - c. Housing needs
 - d. Education and/or vocational opportunities
 - e. Mentoring to provide practical and emotional support
 - i. Increase former offenders' connections to family and community
 - ii. Assist client with getting to appointments ?
 - f. Job training and/or employment referral, apprenticeships, internships
 - g. Financial assistance (DSS)
- D. Provide outreach to participants upon release from the jail.
- E. Identify and address ongoing barriers to services and success.
- F. Meet regularly with reentry team and other stakeholders in community
- G. Collaborate with numerous agencies and initiatives in the coordination of services for reentry participants (see above)
- H. Report back to CJATI and the Public Safety Committee regularly

Narrative: As noted above, the most pressing need is for a coordinator position - a point person - for assessment and discharge planning and to pull all the available services together in a coordinated, efficient manner. Services are disjointed, and navigating the system is difficult. ***A Reentry Coordinator would have the necessary experience, authority and oversight to work in and with the Jail, Probation and service agencies already knowledgeable in reentry.*** Assessment at early incarceration to determine risk level and services needed is key. Not all offenders share the same risk levels or have the same needs, and learning how to accurately assess these attributes and deliver customized help is an important element to truly helping people transition out of the criminal justice system.

PHASE 2. EVALUATE EFFICACY OF CURRENT SERVICES AND IDENTIFY INEFFICIENCIES OR DEFICIENCIES. COORDINATOR AND CJATI WILL BETTER BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY THOSE SERVICES THAT ARE PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE (OR NOT) THROUGH PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND FEEDBACK OVER THE COURSE OF THE FIRST 12-18 MONTHS.

- A. Establish performance measures for the program to include but not be limited to: number of clients offered reentry services, number who participate, number of referrals to services, number of participants who participate in referral appointments, number of participants who remain arrest free, number who are successful or unsuccessful and reason (dropped out, loss of contact, re-arrest, etc)
- B. Coordinator to establish a database, with feedback from CJATI Reentry Team, to develop performance measures, with the capacity to run reports
- C. Study data and performance measure outcomes for possible policy or program changes that may be necessary
- D. Coordinator to report outcomes to CJATI on a regular basis for review and discussion
- E. Coordinator and CJATI to report outcomes to Public Safety Committee and to Legislature

PHASE 3. SEEK ALTERNATIVE FUNDING/GRANT OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPLEMENT CURRENT SERVICES and DEVELOP MISSING OR INADEQUATE SERVICES

- A. Collaborate with OAR, URO and others to identify grant funding opportunities that would address those identified deficiencies and/or inefficiencies
- B. Collaboratively apply for said grants

PHASE 4. - THOUGHOUT THE FIRST 12-18 MONTHS, EXPLORE THE NEED FOR ASSISTANCE FOR COORDINATOR.

- A. Study data and performance measure outcomes for possible policy or program changes that are required, including ratio of participants in the program to the coordinator.
- B. Explore necessity of adding support for the ReEntry Coordinator and ReEntry Plan via other community agencies, grants, and resources.
- C. Seek alternative funding/ grant opportunities for additional staffing to assist the Coordinator; explore cost-effectiveness of enlisting the services of a grant writer to pursue outside funding sources.

FUNDING: The following tentative funding allocations for the ReEntry Program are **ONLY ESTIMATES:**

1. ReEntry Coordinator: \$65,000. CJATI has recommended this function be carried out, at least initially, by a not-for-profit organization working under contract to the County.
2. Grant Writer: \$10,000. It is believed that the substantial commitment of local funds (public and philanthropic) being devoted to reentry, along with the collaboration of the many stakeholders represented on CJATI, OAR, URO and others, can leverage funding from other sources throughout the country. Such supplemental grant funding could assist in achieving goals that would otherwise be beyond the reach of local government and foundations. A skilled grant writer should be retained to pursue funding.
3. Enhanced contractual services for GED and Lifo skills at Day Reporting site to accommodate expected increase in client numbers due to reentry participation and purchase of Evidenced Based Practice curricula: \$25,000. The site of the Day Reporting program, located within the Human Services Building, is an ideal location to provide reentry services. The structure of the facility allows for a separate entrance from the main lobby of the building but the proximity to DSS allows for easy collaboration and service referral. The program currently operates from 8:30 -1:30 Mon-Fri with staffing present to provide GED, employment and life skills programming. To accommodate the expected increase in participants from the reentry program, the goal would be to extend the hours of the service providers beyond 1:30 so that focus can be given to this population. Space could be made available for the Reentry Coordinator to use on a part-time basis to connect with clients, make referrals and coordinate with staff providing employment and GED services. The two classrooms in the facility could also be utilized in the afternoons for evidence-based practice groups geared towards successful reentry efforts, such as Ready Set Work! and Thinking for a Change.