

Why Successful Reentry Is Important For Our Youth



Background

Reentry is the process of transitioning from life in a correctional facility or when placed in an out of home facility to life in one's community. Services to support the proceeding have expanded in communities around the country for both adult and youth offenders who have been in secure facilities. Reentry influences many parts of the criminal justice system and community, with efforts to ease the transition often beginning at the start of incarceration and out of home placement.

Reentry programs have been identified as a way to combat high recidivism rates, and their effectiveness has been in the public spotlight. Comprehensive plans that ease the transition into law abiding lifestyles post-detainment are beginning to garner more support and funding. Congress passed the Second Chance Act in 2007, providing federal grants for services that reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for persons previously convicted and sentenced. These programs receive funding for operations, research, and evaluations. The population benefiting from these supportive networks have completed their court ordered sentences and are integrating back into their communities. The Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018 has further authorized the provision of federal grants for the operation of community-based substance abuse treatment, and assistance with employment, housing, family support, as well as other programming.

The initiation of the Second Chance Act coincides with the pendulum of the justice system swinging away from punitive practices and toward an era of restorative practices that prioritize rehabilitation. Community-based support services and aftercare programs that help justice-involved individuals establish sustainable, law-abiding habits and access appropriate supports increases community safety and allows towns and cities of all sizes to aid their citizens locally. The main barriers to successful long-term reentry include health, securing employment, education, and housing. Aftercare programs for adults and youth alike are most impactful if they include a focus on these needs.

Components of Reentry Programs

Supportive reentry services begin upon entry into the justice system. This approach of "thinking exit at entry" allows the ultimate goal for those incarcerated, success upon release, to remain top of mind in program implementation. Through entry, placement, transition periods, and in community-based aftercare, the focus on long-term success in life after incarceration, programs often deepen the involvement of the offender with the victim as they approach their release date. Parole officials, if applicable, become involved at these later stages to prepare for a smooth transition back into public life without undue challenges. The type of support that is offered is unique to each jurisdiction and each offender based on resources and individual needs.

Most successful reentry programs include two main components, contact and services. Contact involves continued communication with parole/probation personnel when applicable and support in pursuing employment, education, and sobriety. Services include counseling, programs for behavior, restitution initiatives, and vocational/educational programs.

Successful reentry programs for youth acknowledge the extra challenges facing juveniles who have been detained during their developmental years. Maturity has been established as an important component to successful reentry for youth in all areas of life. Three zones of development have been identified as areas of focus for programs. Mastery and self-competence allow youth to go forward with confidence in their skills and ability to function in the world. Mature interpersonal relationships and social functioning establish a network of support, mentorship, and guidance for at-risk youth as they develop and become independent. A clear self-definition and high-quality governance allow decision-making to be easier and more successful in the workplace, classroom, family, and beyond.

Entering adulthood and the workforce with an existing criminal record can be detrimental to employment opportunities, a factor that can be abated with assistance in expunging youth records. Additionally, career training can aid youth when they begin seeking employment and selecting certifications to build their resume and skillset. Successful career training for youth encompasses more than workplace skills, it also emphasizes the importance of following industry recognized standards in their provided certifications. By doing so, participants can continue with their education after leaving the program/facility and will have applicable skills to offer future employers.

Benefits of Strong Reentry Programs

Strong reentry programs have been associated with positive changes in outcomes for youth who have been placed out-of-home and in secure facilities. In programs where youth are connected to mentors, case managers, and opportunities for education and employment, recidivism rates drop dramatically, and life post-detainment is more successful. For example, youth who participated in the Arches Transformative Mentoring Program while on probation in New York recidivated 69% less within 12 months and 57% less within 24 months of probation. Every year over 100,000 juveniles are released from detention facilities and out of home placements, too often returning to communities with high crime rates, poverty, unstable households, underfunded school systems, and unemployment. Over 70% of those in the system have at least one diagnosed mental illness and many have family members who have also been incarcerated, leaving them in dire need of support from their communities.

Pathways to Desistance, a 7-year project on juvenile recidivism run by the University of Pittsburgh, has released preliminary findings on trends related to specific reentry services. The Inter-University Consortium on Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan is responsible for compiling the extensive data collected, but initial findings show that where drug treatment services were provided, substance use was reduced in a 6-month period. This reduction became even more clear when considering drug treatment that incorporated family involvement. Youth diagnosed with

substance abuse disorders were four times more likely to receive drug treatment in residence, showing an attempt to target specific services at the youth who need them most. Pathways to Desistance also found a lack of



post-release services when examining substance abuse programs. The juveniles who accessed drug treatment in their facilities only got treatment post-release in 10% of cases. It was also established that 6 months after release, youth who had community supervision and demonstrated involvement in programs offered within the community were less likely to reoffend, more likely to attend school, and more likely to be employed. As the length of community supervision increased, so did the chance of youth being employed, in school, and free of new criminal activity. Regardless of intervention, it was found that over 91% of juveniles who committed serious felonies decreased their illegal activity within 3 years of the initial act.

Youth can build resiliency and develop positively with improved family relationships, involvement in school, and improving life skills. This confidence diverts youth from behaviors that are harmful or deemed delinquent in nature. Reentry programs that are truly comprehensive focus on these areas of development to set youth on a positive track for their futures.

National Context

Many adult reentry needs such as housing and employment also apply in juvenile settings but are not identical. The Juvenile Reentry Assistance Program, or JRAP, is a national program focusing solely on juvenile interests in the United States. JRAP seeks to alleviate the long-term consequences of having a criminal record as a juvenile, assisting youth up to the age of 24. The program aids youth in their respective states in expunging, sealing, and correcting both juvenile and adult records. They also mitigate the consequences of their charges. This includes addressing lost or suspended drivers' licenses and tackling school readmission. Additionally, JRAP guides juveniles looking to understand their legal rights and limitations when searching for employment following release. The Program is a collaboration of the US HUD and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

In 2021, New Jersey passed legislation creating a two-year restorative and transformative justice pilot program focused on reducing initial and repeat youth involvement with the youth justice system, and making an appropriation. Their pilot program utilizes Restorative Justice Practices and Principles and provides Community-based enhanced reentry wraparound services that include Mental health services; Substance use disorders treatment and recovery; Education support; Employment services; Housing support; Financial literacy and debt support services; Life skills support services; Social support services; and Preventative mentoring services.

Illinois passed the Youth Reentry and Improvement Act in 2009 that requires the Department of Human Services to develop annual recommendations ensuring the effective reintegration of youth into their communities. The Illinois Juvenile Justice Com-

mission, using information from the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Prisoner Review Board, and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, developed a report on youth who have been released from detention facilities and began tracking youth outcomes to develop quarterly reports. The IJJC reports break admissions data down by length of stay, age, and presenting offense. The study done using this data determined that the state's juvenile reentry system is "broken, but not beyond repair". The report recommends that members of the Prisoner Review Board receive training and use specific criteria when making release decisions, with more frequent reviews of youth to track progress and improvement more effectively.

The MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change program has advanced in quite a few states, primarily Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Washington. They aim to foster the collaboration of probation officers and residential treatment staff in creating a single youth offender plan that combines in-residence treatment with community-based after-care. By working together, these parties can create a cohesive transition from placement to community where information sharing is a cornerstone of the program. Models for Change also includes education placements and the development of short- and long-term goals by local school districts working in collaboration with law enforcement and residential staff.



California currently requires every county's Juvenile Justice body to conduct assessments of offered job training services and employment for youth in comparison to reductions of delinquency. These reports offer the state information about what programs have been successful for their youth population and which ones must be revised. A state-wide recidivism report has been released by the Division of Correctional Policy Research and the Internal Oversight Office of Research. The 2017 report explored youth release rates, three-year outcomes, how many juveniles reentered state custody, and the types of return to the system. When these year-to-year findings are compared with reentry programs aimed at reducing recidivism, their effectiveness becomes apparent in the context of the whole state and the most common contributing factors in recidivating, including substance abuse and a lack of education/employment, can be addressed directly.

In the state of Texas, the Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) is required by the state to provide annual reports on probation/release services for juveniles and their effectiveness. Their aim is "to work in partnership with juvenile boards and their local juvenile probation departments to provide a comprehensive range of community-based probation programs and services to ensure public safety, offender accountability, and assistance to offenders in becoming productive, responsible, law-abiding citizens." Now that the Texas Youth Commission has merged with the TJPC to create the Juvenile Justice Department, more data is available regarding the allocation of state funding for juvenile services and their successes. In 2021, the annual report to the Governor and Legislative Budget Board found that 78% of detained youth participated in at least one community-based program, while 64% accessed behavioral health services. They have found that many of the programs being funded by the Juvenile Justice Department have been utilized by youth to improve outcomes.



Maryland has built a task force on prisoner reentry that addresses recidivism in both adult and juvenile facilities. They target the most frequent causes of re-offenses such as continued substance abuse in their probing to enhance community safety. The Maryland Taskforce on Prisoner Reentry has recommended that the state's justice systems be significantly restructured to reduce the number of incarcerated individuals and improve the services available to those who remain upon release. Their initiative encourages reduced spending on prison expenditures, instead using these funds to standardize the current risk and needs assessments conducted in their facilities.

Connecticut Reentry Services

Reentry counselors are available at some facilities in the state of Connecticut who are responsible for a variety of needs. They assist with documentation, passports, IDs and license renewals, as well as setting up discharge meetings to determine needs for housing, food banks, and community agencies. Health providers are also brought in to establish follow up plans with local physicians and ensure any current therapy or medication can continue upon release. Job centers around the state in the York Correctional Institution, Osborn, Carl Robinson, Manson Youth Institution, and Willard-Cybulski are there to provide education on resume writing and interview skills. Reentry begins on incarceration for these counselors, who establish Offender Management Plans that continue through the Parole and Community Services Division until their sentences are completed. An Objective Classification assessment is given that assigns risk level to determine facility assignment and identify current deficiencies and needs. Offender Accountability Plans identify what treatment programs are recommended for the offender, including education, substance abuse, treatment, domestic violence counseling, and parenting courses. The incarcerated can earn Risk Reduction Earned Credits for participating in their plan and can earn early parole eligibility. As the anticipated release date approaches, transition counselors discuss continuing treatments and connecting to community services.

The State of Connecticut also has a variety of programs accessible to the youth population that provide similar services to the adult facility reentry counselors. Many of these sources can be found on the state website of Connecticut for public access.

The Center for Children's Advocacy in Hartford and Bridgeport provides legal representation for at-risk youth who require assistance in accessing services and understanding their rights. The Center has partnered with local and community organizations to identify youth up to the age of 24 and assist them in returning to the community post-confinement. The Center for Children's Advocacy attorneys help the youth they serve understand their record and its significance and take steps to handle the collateral

consequences that may accompany it. Youth can receive help getting back into work and school, gaining access to their identification records, accessing entitled benefits, and re-entering DCF care.

The Urban League of Hartford offers the Urban Youth Reentry Program, which assists youth aged 18-24 who are no longer attending high school but have had formal involvement in the justice system. Youth are assisted in earning college credit, planning careers, finding job placements, and receiving training for professional certifications and life skills. They can also access personal assistance with needs such as transportation, daycare, and professional attire.

The Workforce Alliance of New Haven operates the Ex-Offenders Re-entry program: Recovery Works. The Next Steps program helps ex-offenders seek jobs while learning life skills and receiving job and workplace preparedness training. Workforce Alliance works with New Haven police, courts, parole and probation services, and community partners to provide these programs for at-risk youth and increase their odds of success after reentering their community and workforce.

The Lionheart Foundation was established as a nonprofit in 1992 to provide social emotional learning programs to those who have been incarcerated including adults, youth, and teen parents. They provide SEL training to prepare all their participants for real-world challenges and set them on a successful path with good coping skills and high social intelligence.

An additional online resource available to youth is 2-1-1 Connecticut. This site's reentry page is a comprehensive resource for juveniles looking for a variety of services. 2-1-1 Connecticut is involved with the Alliance of Information and Referral Services (AIRS), where Community Resources are compiled and shared with providers who can refer patients, clients, and other individuals including youth to the local services that match their needs. 2-1-1 compiles resources for:

- Retrieving ID documents after incarceration including DMV and birth certificate
- Finding free/reduced cost clothing and household goods
- Reinstating driver's licenses
- Establishing/changing current guardianship
- Gaining child custody
- Accessing Social security card
- Gaining voting rights- for convicted felons
- Family support services
- Receiving pardons
- Accessing inmate trust funds and bank accounts



The Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee has established a Reentry Sub Workgroup that is looking into the development of a successful reentry plan that will provide Connecticut's youth with the opportunity for better outcomes upon their return to their community. They are reviewing reentry models and best practices across the country and will look to incorporate restorative and transformative justice principles, as well as a quality assurance framework for monitoring the successful discharge and re-entry of incarcerated youth.

Looking Forward



Reentry success has impacts that echo throughout all communities. With rehabilitative approaches to juvenile justice becoming more widespread, interest from policymakers and legislative bodies in enhancing these programs is increasing. Community support for at-risk youth decreases recidivism and increases safety, keeping youth closer to their communities and decreasing secure facility placement. These impacts speak to the positive effect reentry and aftercare services can have in the United States when

implemented with evidence-based practices and appropriate funding and support. It is important for professionals in juvenile justice to understand the prevalence and growth of reentry services as they continue to be introduced to new communities in the United States.

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The Tow Youth Justice Institute is a university, state and private partnership established to lead the way in juvenile justice reform through collaborative planning, training, research and advocacy.

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