

ALLEGHENY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



JUSTICE RELATED STATE SUPPORT SERVICES: A Manual for Replication



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Facing increasing incarceration rates and corresponding prison costs, public officials and key stakeholders in counties across the country must address the challenge of meeting the public safety needs of their communities and reducing associated costs. Treating these critical issues with a business-as-usual approach will not reduce incarceration rates or bring down the costs of housing an inmate.

What the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) has found is that the best way to address these significant community issues is to collaborate with other agencies and stakeholders to help former inmates to reintegrate successfully into their communities when possible and break the cycle of incarceration.

Since 1988, the DHS Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) in partnership with the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, the Office of the Public Defender, the Office of the District Attorney, the Office of Probation and Parole, the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has worked to expand services designed to keep people with a mental health diagnosis, those with substance use disorders and those with co-occurring disorders out of jail and in their communities.

Several of the programs were initiated with federal and state grant funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, respectively. Several local foundations also supported program development and implementation.

In 2006, by building on and supplementing existing justice-related programs, Allegheny County adopted the Sequential Intercept Model (Munetz and Griffin, 2006) as its guide to developing a comprehensive continuum of justice-related services and supports. Currently, behavioral health and justice-related services are available to divert people from incarceration – or to reduce the duration of incarceration – from the time of initial police response to the time that a person completes his or her maximum sentence in a state correctional institution.

This document focuses on one of the Intercept 4 activities, specifically a re-entry program for persons with behavioral health problems who are completing maximum prison sentences. The program seeks to reduce recidivism by building relationships prior to release and providing essential supports upon release.

INTERCEPT ONE

Pre-arrest diversion
CJ/MH Collaborative
Police-based CIT

INTERCEPT TWO

Post-arrest/Jail diversion
Pre-Booking Diversion Services
Justice-Related Diversion Services

INTERCEPT THREE

Court/Jail Diversion
Mental Health Court
Drug Court

INTERCEPT FOUR

Re-entry from jail
Justice-Related (County) Support Services
*CROMISA**

INTERCEPT FIVE

Probation/Parole
Justice-Related State Support Services
*CROMISA**

**CROMISA (Community Reintegration for Offenders with Mental Illness and Substance Abuse [Munetz and Griffin, 2006])*

Justice-Related State Support Services

("Max Out" Program)

The nationally recognized Allegheny County Justice-Related State Support Services (JRSS) is part of the fourth intercept of the Sequential Intercept Model – Re-entry from jails, prison, hospitals (Munetz and Griffin, 2006) - and is designed specifically for persons with mental illness or co-occurring disorders who have completed their maximum state prison sentences.

This program, formerly known as the "Max Out" program, links a Justice-Related State Support Specialist (Specialist) with an inmate, if he or she chooses to participate, while the inmate is nearing the expiration of his or her maximum prison sentence in a state correctional institution.

The early connection allows for trust to develop between the Specialist and the inmate so a release plan that addresses that individual's particular strengths and challenges can be developed. In this way, an inmate may leave the prison environment with supports in place to help him or her reintegrate to his or her community as a productive, valuable and valued member of society.

Since its official inception in July 1999, the Allegheny County JRSS has served hundreds of individuals from all 26 of Pennsylvania's state penitentiaries.

The common factors are that these individuals are going to be returning to Allegheny County with no parole; have a history of mental illness, often with substance misuse; and are at the highest risk of re-arrest. Despite these obstacles, however, program participants have demonstrated continued success in their recovery, recidivating at a rate one-fifth of that of all individuals released from a state penitentiary.

The success of the JRSS lies in its design to build trusting relationships through the collaborative effort of meeting each individual's distinct needs and easing anxiety associated with the re-entry process.

Why a “How To?”

The Allegheny County JRSS was selected as a winner of the 2005 Innovations in American Government Award presented by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government and administered by the Council for Excellence in Government. One of six winners nationally, OBH Justice Related Services (JRS) received a \$100,000 award with a requirement to dedicate a portion of the funds to promoting replication of the program.

This manual was created to inform and assist other communities that may be interested in replicating similar re-entry efforts. By building upon the experiences of Allegheny County, DHS hopes that choosing to support persons with mental illness and substance use disorders through their re-entry into society will become common practice, and that this population will thereby move from being repeat offenders to being productive members of society.

Build the Foundation

Before any community (local government) devotes staff hours and public and private dollars to develop this type of initiative, it is important to know the level of need and interest.

State Departments of Corrections (DOC) have the information necessary: inmates approaching maximum sentence dates; county of residence; and current and/or probable need of behavioral health services from the home community, upon release.

With this information, states and counties can better project the level and complexity of a re-entry program. It should be noted, however, that an inability to serve ALL eligible inmates should not deter a county from starting a program. Small steps in the right direction are better than no steps at all. In fact, it may be better to develop a program as complex as JRSS on a strong foundation, but without strict boundaries.

Having buy-in, encouraging open dialogue and being community-based are all important, and with stakeholders invested in the process, allowances should be made so the program can expand and retract and be tested and tweaked in response to actual outcomes rather than projected ones.

Design the Program

Planning a community-specific program should be done with the input of all stakeholders. This serves two important purposes:

1. getting input from as many people with varied perspectives of this complex issue provides a more complete accounting of anticipated pitfalls and successes, and
2. incorporating the ideas of stakeholders makes the final product a joint venture, increasing buy-in.

Building a solution to improve reintegration outcomes requires a commitment from state officials in the DOC; prison staff – superintendent to counselors; community providers, including housing supports, and local law enforcement. All of these stakeholders need to be aware and supportive of re-entry programs if individuals are to succeed.

The design of the State Support Services in Allegheny County holds the prison staff accountable for appropriate notification and access to the inmate. While referrals to JRS usually come from prison behavioral/mental health staff, the referrals could originate from other staff in the prison.

The important factor is that once the referral is made and JRS mobilizes to begin release planning, the prison agrees to accommodate the process and allow the time necessary to build the trust needed between the JRS State Support Specialist and the inmate. To begin building that rapport with an inmate, a JRS Specialist will initiate recurring visits (ideally beginning a year before release) with the goal of establishing a release plan for the inmate that includes links to all the desired and necessary supports.

It is equally important that community-based services/provider staff respect and adhere to the visiting policies and programs of a prison.

Divide the tasks

Prison –

Services offered to inmates in prison will lay the groundwork for much of the work that will be done on the “outside” to support the former inmate. So, before any program that involves inmates is attempted, a working relationship between human services providers and the government bodies that oversee county and state corrections must be in place. Moreover, the cooperation and support of correctional institution staff and administrators is imperative.

A concerted effort to provide mental health and substance use therapy and treatment, educational support and parenting classes will help inmates make good use of incarceration time. Any progress that can be made during an inmate’s prison sentence will be an advantage later.

In Pennsylvania

The existence of a “program” in Allegheny County to assist individuals being released with no community supports, some of whom may have been incarcerated for a decade or more, quickly spread throughout the state prison network.

The County-employed State Support Specialists were sometimes seen as a conduit between the state facility and the community providers. As a result, an enhanced structure had to be applied to this program so that referral, identification and service delivery processes were consistent across institutions.

Community -

Just as in the general population, the physical and mental health needs of former inmates with mental health concerns are varied. The same community-based providers of physical and behavioral health services that assist the general public are tapped to serve the former inmate population, as well. The broad range of services that will be needed include:

- ▷ Primary Care
- ▷ Out-patient treatment
- ▷ In-patient care
- ▷ Residential care
- ▷ Support groups
- ▷ Drop-in centers

In Allegheny County

The public medical insurance program in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is known as HealthChoices. In Allegheny County, the behavioral health component of HealthChoices is implemented through a contractual arrangement with Community Care Behavioral Health Organization (CCBHO). CCBHO is a non-profit, federally tax-exempt, behavioral health managed care organization (BH-MCO) that manages behavioral health services for nearly one million members whose health coverage is sponsored through Medicaid (medical assistance), Medicare and commercial plans.

In most cases, specialized services for the former inmate population have been incorporated into existing programs. The Allegheny County DHS Office of Behavioral Health contracts with eight Service Coordination Units (SCUs – the mental health provider entities in Allegheny County) and other local agencies to provide the myriad of supports and services for consumers.

The SCUs and other local behavioral health/service providers are state-funded through behavioral health programs administered at the county and also bill Medical Assistance for some treatment and support services.

Housing Options With or Without Supportive Services

Existing public and private housing options should be tapped as long as safeguards are in place to minimize possible confrontations between neighbors.

On-site service coordination and behavioral health services may provide welcomed structure to the life of the newly released former inmate.

In addition, specialized housing providing intensive services for persons with severe behavioral health issues should also be available, if needed. Housing options may include:

- ▷ Rental assistance
- ▷ Transitional housing
- ▷ Housing plus services
- ▷ Permanent housing
- ▷ Therapeutic residence

In Allegheny County

There is a broad range of publicly funded housing options for persons with mental health concerns, substance use disorders and co-occurring disorders. Safe, affordable housing for this population, however, is a significant challenge.

DHS recognized early on that relationship building with the housing community was also going to be necessary if reintegration was to be successful for these individuals. Similarly, given the lack of financial resources upon release, some amount of flexible or contingency funds would need to be available to assist with housing.

Whenever possible, a permanent situation will be obtained prior to release from prison and Justice Related Services will pay for up to three months rent. A temporary program (e.g., shelter) will be utilized if necessary only until a full-time residence can be acquired.

Service Coordination (case management) and Oversight

Every time a new program or the expansion of an existing program is contemplated, two obvious questions arise:

- Who will run it? and
- How will we pay for it?

The equally obvious alternative answers are:

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- We will create something new and independent, or
- We will redistribute staff and/or funding to meet the new needs.

In Allegheny County

Dedicated staff is certainly the ideal in most direct case management services. Barring that, expanding the reach of existing staff to include a new population is a suitable alternative.

In Allegheny County, the State Support Services evolved from existing justice-related County support and diversion services already in existence to assist those entering, incarcerated at or leaving the County Jail.

Initially, existing staff from these other programs also managed the reintegration of inmates who were referred from the state facilities. Because of overwhelming similarities in the jail and prison programs, this commingling made sense. This option clearly requires that staff and supports are already available and can be safely redirected to assist the targeted population.

As the program began to evolve and expand, the need to employ additional dedicated and experienced staff became evident. In fact, the core attribute of the Allegheny County JRSS is the personal attention each former inmate is afforded throughout his/her reentry process. Strong and trusting relationships that are formed on both sides lead participants away from expected outcomes to better ones.

Basic Needs and Tangible Goods

When an individual exits prison, there is at least some likelihood that his/her natural supports of the past are no longer in place. Family and friends may have lost contact by design or by drift. Basic needs may be lacking. It is important to make certain that the former inmate is supplied with the basics of food, shelter appropriate clothing, a means of transportation, and, if necessary, a continuing supply of medications for either or both physical and mental health problems, until he or she is able to access these things independently.

By the time an inmate is ready for release, the State Support Specialist is well aware of the resources required to meet the identified basic needs – behavioral health prescription programs (in the state and county), food banks, affordable department stores, resale clothing stores and subsidized transportation programs all offer sources of discounted goods and services.

Acknowledging the need for specialized discharge planning, the Allegheny County DHS Office of Behavioral Health also created a separate fund (often called flex or contingency funds) to assist special needs offenders who qualify. Initially, the fund was supplied by fines levied due to overcrowding at the former Allegheny County Jail.

Since the opening of a new jail, the fund has been replenished by additional sources such as Allegheny County's mental health allocation from the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Allegheny County's Justice-Related State Support Services estimates that it spends about \$3,000 per former inmate over the course of his or her involvement with a State Support Specialist. The amount is based on approximately 60 days of service provision and includes, but is not limited to: clothing, food, medicine, rent, transportation and, on a limited basis, some court payments.

Enduring Supports: Education, Job-training, Life-skills Training, and Parenting Classes

For a former inmate to contribute to society, certain supports must be in place. Helping former inmates pass high school equivalency tests is an important first step for those who did not graduate high school, since a high school diploma is the minimum requirement for most employment.

Having a criminal record makes getting a job decidedly more difficult. Add mental health concerns and possible substance abuse to that reality, and it is clear that without targeted supports for this population, independence at any level will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

On-the-job training and enrollment in trade schools and community colleges offer an excellent way to help former inmates move from incarceration to productivity.

Barriers to success exist when simple living skills like responsible budgeting, efficient scheduling and personal hygiene as well as proper attire, language and decorum are absent. Life-skills trainings that can level the playing field are strongly recommended.

A high percentage of prison inmates are parents. Longer sentences may undermine an inmate's goal of being reunited with his or her child(ren). In those cases where reunification is a possibility, assisting fathers and mothers with classes specifically designed to improve parenting skills can help to keep families together.

In Allegheny County

Educational and employment opportunities are explored while a person is still in prison so that some initial post-release planning can be made. Once the individual is released from prison and is stable – with a residence, with a service provider, and receiving benefits – a more in-depth assessment is made to determine work or school readiness.

It is not beneficial to the individuals or the reintegration process to push employment or school if the person is not ready. Like anyone else, an individual returning to a community after an extended absence needs some time to assimilate. Expecting too many achievements too quickly is likely to be detrimental to the reintegration process.

With that in mind, every effort is made to determine if the individual is able to perform in a work or academic environment and to determine an optimal level of engagement. Preparation for high school equivalency exams – GED – and Adult Basic Education are handled by a local trade school. Individuals who are able to work are introduced to Labor Ready, a local day-laborer center. The PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation assists persons with disabilities find gainful employment.

Finally, some local businesses have a commitment to hire former inmates. The Justice-Related State Support Specialist assists with the desired connection and supports the former inmate by following up and even visiting the work site for as long as necessary. It is imperative at this juncture that readjustment problems in an educational or job setting be identified and addressed as soon as possible.

Justice-Related State Support Specialists work with an individual as long as necessary after his or her release. The average span of intensive contact is 90 days.

Sell the Concept

Not in my backyard. It is a common mantra in rural, suburban and urban communities alike.

Concern for public safety and maintaining property values and moral righteousness commonly motivate residents to resist the influx of persons of “questionable character” into their communities.

This is understandable and should be anticipated, as the public has a right to be informed about the range of implications – the risks and the benefits – of having a JRSS-type program. Expecting this public resistance, DHS believes that prior to the implementation of a JRSS-type program, a communications plan should be firmly in place.

Honest conversations and public disclosures ahead of any possible negative event will generally defuse the response of the public, at least somewhat. And, just as funders can be moved by personal testimonials, so too can the public. Counties can add to their reserve of goodwill by bringing the success stories of a program to the public’s attention.

Creating ways that the public can contribute to the successful reintegration of particular former inmates is also an option. Never underestimate the power of buy-in.

While crucial to selling the idea, buy-in will only get part of the job done. Positive outcomes make the case. All stakeholders in a newly implemented JRSS-type program should remain vigilant, as much as possible, to ensure that participants do not recidivate and actually do resume life in the community as productive citizens.

There is no quicker way to sour the public or funders than to suffer from the bad publicity of a dramatically failed attempt at reintegration. In contrast, positive outcomes offer a great way to promote any program to funders.

Across the country, costs related to the criminal justice system – for both jail and prosecution – continue to increase. Federal, state and county governments have a vested interest in taking steps to reduce those costs while keeping communities safe. Making an argument, based on outcomes data from successful programs in similar jurisdictions, for supporting former inmates in the community as a means to reducing recidivism is the best way to persuade lawmakers and policymakers to offer their cooperation.

State and Federal departments of corrections and local mental health service providers and county corrections and behavioral health programs funded through state and federal sources can often act creatively to direct monies from less cost-effective programs into reintegration programs. Additionally, local and national foundations interested in the welfare of persons with mental illness, in the prevention of homelessness, in rehabilitation of offenders, or in community restoration and wellness may be equally moved to support such efforts.

In Allegheny County

While justice-related support services are typically a net financial win for counties, in order to save money in the long term, counties must spend money in the short term.

How a county supports its prevention services is often a function of how enthusiastically stakeholders buy-in and how well prevention is justified as having a higher societal purpose. In other words, the willingness of funders to commit to a reintegration program is directly related to how well a county executed the planning of the program.

The following statement cannot be stressed enough: Involving potential private funders in the planning process increases confidence in the viability, as well as understanding of, the complexity of the program.

By providing solid data on persons served, on-average anticipated costs and duration of services per person, and on anticipated savings per person, funding requests become more viable. Further, by starting small, perhaps by redirecting non-dedicated funds and building a portfolio of success stories from the community, outcomes of a local nature can replace those of distant states and counties. Personal testimonies are powerful fundraising tools.

Sustaining the Program

No matter how successful a program is, sustaining it, both financially and temporally, requires energy. That said, if the success of a program can be demonstrated with clear, defensible, cost-benefit data, the most conservative funders and policy makers are more likely to be supportive. In addition to cold, hard numbers, anecdotal evidence of lives changed can generate support as well. A combination of the two is preferable.

Gather good data

Good data is defensible data. Careful record-keeping of procedural advances and costs associated with them helps program administrators illustrate the care with which the program was designed. Financial comparisons between the options of traditional release-without-services and a well-constructed reintegration program must also be kept.

Recidivism, a lynchpin of any argument for reform in the criminal justice system, must also be quantified and recorded.

In the end, cost savings and safer communities will motivate the public and private sectors to embrace and financially support the array of justice-related services for persons with behavioral health concerns.

Tell their stories

To the extent that it is possible, personalizing any success for the public will have a positive effect. The public and private sources of financial support, policy makers, taxpayers and foundations will want to know in real terms, what difference their contributions have made in the lives of others. Traditional media outlets may not be easily accessible, but alternatives exist:

- Newsletters published by stakeholders in the program are a great vehicle.
- Web sites of both public and private agencies can also be tapped as a resource. They offer the advantage of being updated easily to maintain fresh content.

- Public awareness campaigns that highlight justice-related services by spotlighting individuals who have benefited from the programs are also an option. 14

Every instance taken to improve community understanding of the complexity of the issue will have a pay-off. Longevity in human and justice-related services is always tied to positive outcomes.

Conclusion

Allegheny County has benefitted from the forward-thinking, collaborative nature of key stakeholders in the areas of human services, behavioral health and criminal justice. These traits brought an openness to problem-solving that dissolved barriers and counterproductive turf disputes.

Equal priority was given to the well-being of the community and the successful reintegration of individuals in the community, and creative methods to reduce expensive and exhaustive recidivism were devised and tested. The Justice-Related State Support Services evolved into one method that is successful in Allegheny County – a success that holds promise for other jurisdictions.

At a time when money and win/win programs are in short supply, implementing a “Max Out” program in counties around the nation is an excellent way to capitalize on a good thing.

Outline of the Allegheny County Justice-Related State Support Services

Assess (Former) Inmate’s Needs

As indicated, the foundation of the program lies in working with the inmate well in advance of his or her release from prison. The task of determining the needs of each inmate is of primary importance.

- Immediate supports – medication, transportation, housing, clothing, food
- Medical needs – therapy, treatment, support group
- Long-term supports – education, job training, life skills, parenting skills

Match Specialist with former inmate

By the time a person in a reintegration program walks out of the prison, all potential providers should be in place and prepared to take on the challenge of anticipating and meeting the needs identified in the individual’s services plan, which was developed while the person was still incarcerated. Attention to detail is required, and no assumptions about self-reliance should be made.

Most supports, from the basic to the enduring, should be anticipated prior to release. By accompanying the person through the transition, it will be possible to resolve additional issues as they arise. Helping the individual create a network of natural supports on the “outside” is an important part of any reintegration process. This includes family, friends, religious supports, retailers and neighbors.

Additionally, it is important to make sure the individual’s behavioral health needs are met. Ongoing treatment and therapy as well as emergency numbers to call in case of crisis are also important.

Dedicate the Resources

In preparation for release from prison, if necessary, program staff arrange for housing that is consistent with the needed level of care. Once the individual is back in the community, rent can be covered for up to three months.

Mental health treatment with service coordination (case management) follow-up and support is pre-arranged as well. If substance use is an issue, in-patient or out-patient drug and alcohol treatment is also set up.

Upon release, the individual is met either at the bus terminal or picked up personally from prison. Bus passes and instructions about how to use public transportation are provided for future transportation needs. Transportation is made available through Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP) for non-emergency medical purposes. Arrangements are made to ensure court-related and/or benefits appointments are kept.

The individual is taken shopping to choose groceries and new clothes on a limited but sufficient budget. The staff member escorts the individual through the process of applying for any benefits for which he or she may be eligible, such as SSI, SSDI and welfare benefits.

Educational and employment opportunities are also explored. As part of continuing service coordination, state support staff can determine to what extent persons with mental illness or co-occurring disorders are able to work or to receive education or training. GED or Adult Basic Education, employment and training programs, and job placement are provided as indicated.

Contact Information

If you would like additional information, please contact the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health, Justice-Related Services at 412-350-7337.

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