

Hudson County / Jersey City Site Visit

Opportunities for developing an Integrated Reentry and Employment Initiative Serving Individuals with Criminal Records

In October 2013, staff from the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG Justice Center) traveled to Hudson County, New Jersey (Hudson County) / Jersey City, New Jersey (Jersey City) to meet with state and local leaders to discuss the jurisdictions' interest in developing an integrated reentry and employment initiative with the dual aims of reducing recidivism as well as improving job readiness outcomes among people with criminal records in the community. Conversation focused on current reentry and public safety projects underway in the community, as well as a discussion on the *Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies: Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Job Readiness (Integrated Strategies)* white paper and how the city/county is prepared to implement some of the key recommendations. Through conversation, it was clear that city/county agencies and their respective partners are well-positioned to implement a collaborative and integrated initiative. Of particular note were the political will, leadership, and commitment present in Hudson County/Jersey City. Provided below is a summary of the findings and recommendations from this meeting.

Introduction to the Hudson County Second Chance Act (SCA) project

The Hudson County SCA project serves individuals with a diagnosed mental health and/or substance use disorders who have been arrested, incarcerated and sentenced to the Hudson County Correctional Center more than once and reside in Hudson County. Services are provided through partnership with community-based providers, and include: housing services, outpatient substance abuse services, cognitive/behavioral day treatment services, bus passes for treatment and training, medical services, psychotropic medication, and community assessment/case management services. When eligible participants are identified and enrolled, case managers link participants to existing educational, training and vocational services through the county's One-Stop programs. Participation in community re-entry services is voluntary for most inmates since most have served complete sentences and are not on probation. The Task Force Legal Committee, which now includes judicial representation, is recommending early release contingent on wearing a bracelet and mandatory re-entry programming to ensure individuals are participating in appropriate services.

To help assess and determine impact of the project, as well as help case managers and other partners/administrators guide implementation, a shared data collection form is created for each participant and is routinely updated by key partners at monthly intervals. This form is provided to the project's evaluator for assessing impact. Data is tracked and analyzed using SPSS. Findings are used to make program adjustments accordingly.

Opportunities to Implement a Collaborative, Integrated Reentry and Employment Initiative

Built on careful planning and coordination between community leaders, county/city agency administrators, and service providers, the success of the Hudson County SCA Project has been in many ways a significant benchmark in bringing effective recidivism/reentry efforts to the forefront of public safety initiatives nationally in New Jersey. It has also been critical to opening doors for new reentry-focused public safety initiatives. To this end, local leaders are eager to capitalize on this momentum and develop new, effective reentry and public safety initiatives. As such, CSG Justice Center staff met with local leaders and service providers to discuss opportunities to implement a collaborative reentry and workforce development initiative. In this conversation, CSG Justice Center determined that the city/county is well positioned to being work on such an initiative, and likewise offered recommendations for beginning the planning process for a new project based upon recommendations outlined in the *Integrated Strategies* white paper. (For more information on this white paper and how it can be used to inform a system-wide planning process, as well as design a new program(s) or enhance existing services,

please see: <http://csgjusticecenter.org/reentry/the-reentry-and-employment-project/integrated-reentry-and-employment/>).

To help the city/county with ongoing planning activities, the CSG Justice Center offered to provide a summary of recommendations and next steps to help the site move forward. Additionally, CSG Justice Center staff will notify Frank Mazza, Henry Plotkin, and Governor Jim McGreevey once the Reentry and Employment Project Demonstration Project Call for Applicants is released.

Please see the summary of observations and recommendations from the site visit below. This serves as a record of conversation, and includes recommendations for planning and implementing an initiative.

I. *Planning, Leadership, and Goals*

There is clear commitment and dedication to improving reentry and employment outcomes for people with criminal histories in Hudson County/Jersey City, as evidenced by the participants that joined the October meeting.

Recommendations:

- Establish a project steering committee comprised of community-based reentry service providers, community-based workforce development providers, county/city agency corrections and workforce development administrators, and other leaders actively engaged in public safety, reentry, and workforce development activities.
- Appoint or elect committee co-chairs that represent corrections, local service providers, and workforce development. Involvement or endorsement from the chief executive office of the jurisdiction is also advised.
- Define and agree upon the project mission and goals, benchmark objectives, meeting procedures, and membership expectations.
- Create and assign subcommittees as needed to address specific issues and content areas.
- Develop short- and long-term strategic plans that outline attainable and measurable goals and objectives.

II. *Assessing System Needs and Resources*

It is clear that Hudson County/Jersey City has a network of diverse services available through county/city agencies or in the community, and leaders working in the criminal justice system coordinate well within these networks. As demonstrated by the Hudson County SCA grant program, officials working in recidivism reduction field have demonstrated expertise in developing a reentry strategy that matches individuals' unique needs with available services. Hudson County/Jersey City is well-prepared to apply some of the lessons learned from their SCA program to a joint recidivism reduction-workforce development strategy. Developing a coordinated, collaborative initiative hinges on assessing the strengths in resources and gaps in resources within the community. Moreover, the county/city should also have a clear understanding of the needs of people returning from incarceration.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a system mapping exercise to develop a report or "map" that:

- 1) **Details where individuals come into contact with the justice system, and how they move through the justice system to reentry back into community (often called “client mapping”).** This particular system map should detail key decision points, such as where risk assessments occur, when individuals are enrolled into particular programs, when an individual transitions to probation or community supervision, and how conditions of supervised release are determined, etc. Of particular importance are when/where risk assessments are conducted and used and the reentry process.
- 2) **Articulates the current assessment and referral process, if any, that drives how an individual moves from correctional supervision to community-based programs and services.** If relevant, this map should also account for information-sharing that may occur among key service providers and independent of the lead county/city agency(ies).
- 3) **Describes system-wide risk and need profiles of the justice-involved population (include key job readiness, employability, and educational achievement information that many workforce providers and employers need to know).** The city/county should develop a report that allows the planning committee to understand the balance of risk scores for the population, the recidivism rates for each risk category, the prevalence of different needs within different risk levels, and level of job readiness (or need for employment) for each risk category. This data should be used to disaggregate the population by risk/needs and job readiness levels, identify a target population, and development treatment groups based upon those described in the *Integrated Strategies* white paper.
- 4) **Catalogues (and builds upon strengths of) available reentry and workforce development services available in the jail or community, or that are typically provided to individuals with criminal histories upon reentry.** This map should serve as an inventory of all the available services, and should include a short description of each service and/or program.
- Refer to the *Integrated Strategies* white paper or slide 14 below to organize workforce services into categories according to their appropriateness for different levels of risk and job readiness.
 - Make note of the kinds of services and programs that are missing from the community.

III. *Developing a Collaborative Initiative*

With the goals and objectives set, and with a clear understanding of how the system functions and what kinds of resources are available or missing, the planning committee should have much of the information needed to develop a clear vision for their new initiative. The planning committee should determine whether they will launch either a systems-level initiative (i.e., a referral network that ensures the right people are connected to the right programs), or whether Hudson County/Jersey City should build a new program and/or enhance existing programs (in this scenario, Hudson County/Jersey City would focus on developing a discrete program specifically designed to provide high risk, low-readiness individuals with integrated behavior-change and job-readiness services).

Recommendations:

- **Identify and clearly define the target population/treatment groups.** Using the maps and inventories created during the process described in II above, clearly identify and define target populations/treatment groups according to the needs of the clients, and goals and objectives of the planning committee. **The target population or treatment group of primary interest should be the higher risk group.** The planning committee should set clearly defined parameters for each group, and include: level of risk and level of job readiness for each group, and other salient needs present within each treatment group.
- **Determine whether there are sufficient services and/or programs available in the community and from county/city agencies to develop a systems-level approach to improving reentry and employment outcomes.** Higher-risk individuals (of both low and high job readiness) will necessitate more intensive risk-reduction services and treatments. Lower risk individuals will not benefit from intensive risk-reduction services. Answering/discussing the following questions will help determine if a systems-level approach is viable:
 - 1) Are there currently a sufficient number of programs or services available to meet the reentry *and* employment needs of the four treatment groups established? Match services and programs with the appropriate treatment group, and note where there is an abundance of services/programs, as well as a lack of services/programs.
 - 2) Are there currently a sufficient number of programs in the community that provide services appropriate for individuals assessed as high risk and low job-readiness, as discussed in the *Integrated Strategies* white paper? Do these services incorporate cognitive behavioral-based treatment approaches? Do these services adhere to the 5 service delivery principles described in the *Integrated Strategies* white paper (see slide 15 in the appendix below)?
 - If there is not a discrete program(s) or agency(ies) that can provide the appropriate services, can agencies and organizations coordinate to ensure programming is sequenced expeditiously and according to recommendations in the *Integrated Services* white paper?
 - 3) Do community-based organizations and government agencies share client information related to risk of recidivism, service history and service needs, referrals, etc.?

If the planning committee determines the community and local corrections and social service agencies have the capacity to coordinate service and address the needs of the different treatment groups, then the planning committee should consider developing a systems-level approach based on seamless referrals, coordinated case management, and client-tracking. *Note:* some minor enhancements may need to be made for services provided to high-risk, low-readiness individuals according to the 5 service delivery principles; the planning committee should seek to ensure that the correct people are placed into the correct programs and services (i.e., it will be important to ensure individuals who are assessed at a low risk of recidivism are not placed into intensive, costly services typically reserved for people at a higher risk of recidivism).

If the planning committee concludes there is not the capacity to implement a system-level approach (e.g., there is a dearth of services appropriate for high risk-low readiness individuals, information-sharing processes are weak or poorly supported), the committee

should consider developing a new pilot program or enhancing an existing program/partnership to meet the needs of the population.

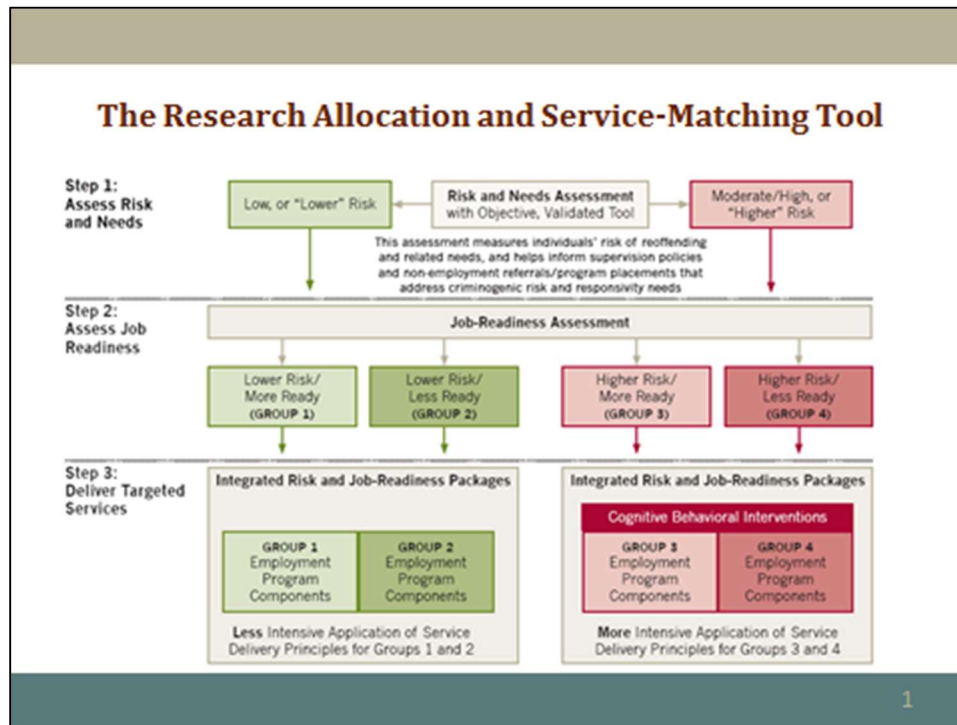
- **Identify opportunities to enhance existing programs, and link services to create a new program tailored specifically for higher-risk individuals.** As discussed in the *Integrated Strategies* white paper, the higher-risk group will require more intensive behavior-change and risk-reduction services compared to the lower group. These services may be particularly effective if they are provided within the context of a job-readiness or job training program. The planning committee should identify ways in which they can ensure higher-risk individuals receive cognitive behavioral-based services before and during participation in employment and employment readiness services. This will provide participants with an opportunity to learn and practice pro-social behaviors and appropriate workplace behaviors.

IV. *Conclusion*

Hudson County/Jersey City has demonstrated strong interest in unifying workforce development leaders, corrections and supervision officials, and community-based organizations in an effort to improve employment and reentry outcomes for community members involved in the criminal justice system. The *Integrated Strategies* white paper can be a powerful tool in navigating the corrections and workforce system, and launching a shared public safety and workforce development initiative.

While the *Integrated Strategies* white paper goes into detail on developing collaborative policies and programs that aim to reduce recidivism and improve job readiness, the white paper does not speak in detail about job development and how to effectively engage the business community in this type of effort. Just as it is important to maintain engagement with program participants and provide ongoing follow-up and support, it is vital to maintain a supportive and pro-active relationship with the business community. Anecdotally, the most successful reentry employment agencies are those who serve as a type of external Human Resources and Training division for business that can hire from the reentry employment program. Therefore, the planning committee should be sensitive to the needs of business owners and engage them in the planning process when making decisions about the kind of training individuals receive and how that training relates to the needs of business owners in the community, as well as the kind of support businesses might look for if they hire an individual from the initiative.

V. References





Service Delivery Principles

“how you do it” based primarily on risk of recidivism

	← Lower-Risk	Higher-Risk →
Service Delivery Principles	Less Intensive Application for Lower-Risk Individuals	More Intensive Application for Higher-Risk Individuals
Engagement	Avoid intensive engagement and case management	Intensive case management with frequent contact
Timing	Timing is still important, but less of a priority for lower-risk individuals	Connect with individuals shortly after release from jail/prison
Incentives	Incentives are less of a priority and need for lower-risk individuals	Enhance motivation through communication and incentives
Coordination	Community supervision should not be intensive, and officers do not have to play as active a role	Work closely with community supervision officers, who can assist with intensive engagement
Structured Time	Avoid structuring time that disrupts existing pro-social ties	Highly structured time to provide a pro-social environment

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An Example

 Group 4	Michael <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 • Felony conviction • High school graduate 	 Group 1	Joseph <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 • Felony conviction • GED
Other Risk Factors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 prior convictions • High prevalence of criminal thinking • History of substance abuse 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No prior convictions • Maintained family ties
Other Job Readiness Factors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed at time of arrest • Gaps in employment history • Limited skills 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employed at time of arrest • Worked in correctional industries while incarcerated
Appropriate Services:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive engagement and highly structured programming • Focus on soft skill development and enhancing job readiness • Intensive community supervision 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with non-corrections funded services that focus on job attainment and retention • Low intensity service delivery and supervision

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