

## History and Overview of Offender Reentry in Iowa

In 2006, the Iowa Department of Corrections (DOC) began work on redesigning its offender reentry process in accordance with an emerging body of evidence-based practices in which reentry planning begins on Day One of an offender's involvement in the prison system. Instead of institutions trying to figure out what to do with an offender while in their custody, the focus now is on "getting offenders ready" to return and succeed in the community.

Much work has been accomplished in this regard since 2006, including the development of a Reentry Offender Management System which includes:

- a statewide case management system; staff training on the principles and practices of "what works" best in changing offender behavior;
- creation of a Department-wide Iowa Corrections Reentry Team consisting of senior Department management to guide all reentry efforts; and
- the Iowa Governor's Executive Order 13 requiring all state agencies to collaborate on offender reentry and creating an Ex-Offender Reentry Coordinating Council to oversee these efforts.

DOC has been engaged in a number of individual reentry projects in recent years, and has utilized federal grant funding to improve reentry efforts for serious and violent offenders and mentally ill offenders, and also to provide vital life skills programming and aftercare services to offenders transitioning from four state adult correctional institutions into the greater Des Moines area.

Over the past several years, DOC has worked to move beyond piecemeal reentry efforts to a comprehensive, cohesive system-wide approach. As noted above, DOC developed the Offender Reentry Management System, which consists of five core components:

- release planning beginning at reception;
- standard assessment battery conducted at reception;
- standard offender reentry case management plan;
- targeted DOC recommended release dates; and
- core treatment assignments.

The reentry plans, which are developed with the active participation of the offender, identifies the top four criminogenic needs and planned interventions to address those needs, and establishes offender behavior expectations. The plans are continually updated as the offender moves through the system.

The standard reentry case plan has been developed, implemented and placed on the DOC database (ICON). The plan is utilized statewide and drives all offender treatment and movement, beginning with reception at the Iowa Medical and Classification Center. In addition, the Board of Parole has designated a Statistical Research Analyst to conduct Board risk assessments at the time of admission to prison. The implementation of front-end risk assessments enables DOC to establish a DOC Release Recommendation Date that drives offender programming and release recommendations.

Responding to the importance DOC places on offender transitional services, the Iowa Legislature in 2006 began funding specialized Reentry Coordinators at each of the state's eight community corrections agencies (CBC's) and at the three adult correctional institutions from which most offenders are released. The function of the Reentry Coordinators is to improve the transition planning and programming for offenders placed on parole. In 2009, DOC was awarded a U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) grant to add Reentry Coordinators at three additional institutions from which mentally ill, young African-Americans and sex offenders exit.

During September 2008, DOC collaborated with BJA to host a three-day *Reentry in the State of Iowa: Accomplishments and Planning for the Future* event attended by about 225 people, most of whom were DOC employees. The attendees broke up into ten separate work groups, which toward the end of the conference submitted reentry implementation recommendations to the newly formed Iowa Corrections Reentry Team (ICRT) for its consideration. The ICRT will design the Iowa Reentry Model and engage offenders, staff, victims and the community in implementing the model. The Iowa Reentry Model will include a defined process and procedures to guide effective reentry from sentencing to discharge, with consideration of resources available in different parts of the state.

A follow-up conference was held in Des Moines on April 22, 2009 to showcase actions taken based on the recommendations made in September. This included changing the DOC's mission statement to read: *To advance successful offender reentry to protect the public, staff and offenders from victimization.* While symbolic on the surface, the new mission statement stresses the importance DOC places on successful offender reentry as the key component helping to make Iowa a safer, better place to live.

In addition, the follow-up conference highlighted the ICRT's efforts to assess, document and re-engineer the case management process to more effectively support successful reentry; the role of Iowa Workforce Development Reentry/Workforce Advisors in connecting offenders to employment opportunities in our communities; and the new DOC custody classification process and the implications for reentry.

As stated above, the Iowa Governor established an Ex-Offender Reentry Coordinating Council to design and guide reentry programming (see Attachment). The membership of the Council, which includes policy level representatives from state agencies responsible for corrections, release planning, drug abuse treatment, housing, education, social services, victim services and employment (among others), ensures coordination of services and responsiveness to a broad spectrum of offender needs. The charge of the Council include identifying and removing barriers to reentry; improving collaboration and coordination among agencies; eliminating duplicate efforts; and identifying and implementing best practices.