

June
2012

HAMILTON COUNTY COMMUNITY REENTRY ACTION PLAN

Building Bridges to Break Barriers

A strategic approach to ensuring Hamilton County's returning citizens are embraced and supported to become self sufficient, contributing members of a safe and thriving community.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Investment in reentry is beneficial to Hamilton County because it results in improved public safety, better outcomes for individuals and family members, and taxpayer savings. The magnitude of the number of individuals returning to communities from incarceration and the complexities of successful reentry has been a nationwide issue for approximately 30 years. The Ohio prison system alone houses approximately 50,000 individuals a day with over nine percent, or 4500 people, coming from Hamilton County. In the past several years, about 29,000 people were released from Ohio's prisons each year with between 2700 and 2900 coming home to Hamilton County.

Recognizing the significance of reentry to the quality of life for the entire community, the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners established the Office of Reentry and hired its first director in March 2011. Given the splintering of reentry services among multiple agencies, the Office of Reentry initiated a community-wide, focused planning process to create a comprehensive plan that promotes successful reentry. In total, 469 individuals participated in some aspect of the planning process including wide-ranging perspectives from representatives of faith-based, criminal justice, social service, health care, and business entities, as well as volunteers and individuals who had personally experienced reentry to the community. Without their commitment of time and expertise, a plan such as this could not have been developed. The Hamilton County Community Reentry Action Plan (Reentry Action Plan) is designed to build upon the strong base of services and investment that already exist. The Reentry Action Plan, though, also fills a gap – a focused and coordinated approach that marshals all of the necessary assets and resources in an effective and efficient manner. It is only the first step in a long process of reaching a community vision for reentry. For the next two years, it provides strategic direction, an organizational structure to achieve that direction, and areas that require further planning and development. Patience and persistence will be required and a willingness to look beyond individual or organizational interests, concentrating instead on those to be served and the greater community good.

The vision, guiding principles, target population, and strategies in the Reentry Action Plan are a result of the consensus-building planning process conducted by the Hamilton County Office of Reentry. All community members were welcome to join the planning process and those that participated contributed and agreed to these primary components of the plan.

Vision:

Hamilton County's returning citizens are embraced and supported to become self-sufficient, contributing members of a safe and thriving community.

Guiding Principles:

- We work collaboratively with all stakeholders to address the individual and system barriers to successful reentry
- We offer a holistic service system that emphasizes the establishment of relationships that cultivate hope, dignity, and self-worth in returning citizens
- Our services are evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and accessible to individuals affected by the criminal justice system and their family members

Primary Target Population:

- Adult and juvenile males and females in Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction prisons returning to Hamilton County with a medium or high probability to re-offend
- Emphasis on those needing assistance and desiring services

Priority Strategies:

Three priority strategies provide a focus for the efforts of community partners to remove barriers to successful reentry in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

Strategy 1: Establish the Hamilton County Reentry Resource Center

A welcoming place, centrally located that provides a full range of services and supports to individuals returning from incarceration.

Strategy 2: Strengthen Pre-Release Services

A partnership between Hamilton County agencies and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to address critical needs of those returning to Hamilton County prior to their release.

Strategy 3: Develop Workforce and Expand Employment Opportunities

A prepared, skilled reentry workforce available to employers to meet their most pressing needs and achieving market-rate compensation.

Further planning, development, and community discussion that allows for input and consensus is required in the areas of housing, health and wellness, and community awareness and

support. Moving to implementation quickly with immediate accomplishments is essential to sustain the investment of those already involved and to engage others to obtain their participation and contributions. Creation of the infrastructure to implement the Hamilton County Reentry Action Plan and obtaining initial start-up funds will be addressed first. As progress is made on implementing the Reentry Action Plan, a structured system of reporting and refinement will be instituted with annual open community sessions.

REENTRY

Investment in reentry is beneficial to Hamilton County because it results in improved public safety, better outcomes for individuals and family members, and taxpayer savings. But with any investment, the investment must be expected to reap positive results and the return on that investment must be maximized. An understanding of the many aspects of reentry is essential to making informed decisions. Washington State provides a good example of maximizing investment by understanding interventions that are shown to be effective. The Washington State Legislature enacted the Offender Accountability Act to “reduce the risk of re-offending by offenders in the community.” To support achievement of this objective, the Legislature commissioned the Washington State Institute for Public Policy “to provide policy makers with a comprehensive assessment of adult corrections programs and policies that have a proven ability to affect crime rates.” Publications were developed that offered a review of the evidence on what works and a cost benefit analysis. Data from this analysis demonstrate cost savings ranging from a low of \$4500 per participant to a high of \$72,000 per participant for participation in a variety of services, education, and employment activities. Learning from the State of Washington, selected national, state, and local information on reentry is provided in this section to help frame the issue and provide grounding for the resulting recommendations in the Reentry Action Plan.

The magnitude of the number of individuals returning to communities from incarceration and the complexities of successful reentry has been a nationwide issue for approximately 30 years. The following selected “Reentry Facts” listed by the National Reentry Resource Center help to understand the issue today:

- Federal and state corrections facilities held over 1.6 million prisoners at the end of 2010 — approximately one of every 201 U.S. residents
- During 2010, 708,677 sentenced prisoners were released from state and federal prisons, an increase of nearly 20% from 2000
- At least 95% of state prisoners will be released back to their communities
- In a study that looked at recidivism in over 40 states, more than four in 10 offenders returned to state prison within three years of their release

- The incidence of serious mental illnesses is two to four times higher among prisoners than it is in the general population
- Three quarters of those returning from prison have a history of substance use disorders
- More than 10 percent of those entering prisons and jails are homeless in the months before their incarceration
- The prevalence of chronic illnesses and communicable diseases is far greater among people in jails and prisons
- Less than half of released prisoners had secured a job upon their return to the community
- Of parents held in the nation's prisons — 52% of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates — reported having an estimated 1,706,600 minor children, accounting for 2.3% of the U.S. resident population under age 18

The Ohio prison system alone houses approximately 50,000 individuals on any given day, the size of a medium Ohio city. In July 2011, 4905 individuals committed by Hamilton County were in Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) prisons constituting 9.7% of the entire population. Hamilton County committed 2067 individuals to the ODRC in Fiscal Year 2011, second only to Cuyahoga County, and representing 9.3% of the total statewide commitments. Based on the Calendar Year 2011 ODRC Population Summary report:

- Almost half of individuals committed from Hamilton County serve more than 365 days in prison (49.7%); 25% serve 6 months or less, while the remaining 25% serve between 6 and 12 months
- Almost one third (31.3%) of Hamilton County individuals are 24 years old or younger at the time of commitment
- The 3-year return to prison rate for Hamilton County commitments is 32.1%

In November 2011, the Ohio Adult Parole Authority had 2210 individuals residing in Hamilton County under supervision as follows:

- 182 under Intensive supervision (8.2%)
- 642 under Basic supervision (29%)
- 923 under Basic Low supervision (41.8%)
- 131 in residential (5.9%)
- 286 on a Monitored caseload (12.9%)
- 241 sex offenders (10.9%)

In addition, approximately half of the individuals released from Ohio prisons have no on-going supervision requirements and are left to navigate a variety of barriers that pose challenges to successful reentry.

Besides understanding the magnitude and nature of individuals returning to communities from incarceration, it is also important to obtain insight on effective approaches. A few examples follow:

- A meta-analysis consisting of 374 effect sizes from 225 studies found that cognitive-behavioral/social learning programs had a greater positive impact on recidivism reduction for higher risk offenders than for lower risk offenders
- A meta-analysis of 69 studies on the effectiveness of behavioral and cognitive-behavioral programs found that cognitive-behavioral programs demonstrated the largest reductions in recidivism; the specific types of programs yielding the most impact were cognitive-behavioral skills development programs and cognitive skills programs
- A meta-analysis of 33 evaluations of education, vocation, and work programs for adult offenders found that program participants were employed at a higher rate and recidivated at a lower rate than non-participants
- Research indicates that employment is associated with lower rates of reoffending, higher wages are associated with lower rates of reoffending, and increases in employment are associated with reductions in all types of crimes (violent, drug, property); research also indicates that practitioners cannot address employment in a vacuum and need to understand the impact of other criminogenic risk/needs on both sustained employment and recidivism
- A meta-analysis of 58 studies examined the relationship between 74 potential predictors and two types of recidivism for mentally ill offenders – general and violent; the most common diagnoses for the participants were schizophrenia (70%) and antisocial personality disorder; overall, having a mental illness was associated with less recidivism (both general and violent); the exception was for those with antisocial personality disorder
- Studies consistently find that family support during and after incarceration is correlated to reduced recidivism; studies also find that family members are often key in providing housing and employment support to those returning to prison; family support has also been linked to better outcomes for those involved in substance abuse treatment

Though many issues challenge communities in achieving a high quality of life for its residents, an investment in a focused, community-wide effort supporting successful reentry is more than justified.

BACKGROUND

Recognizing the wide-ranging impact the criminal justice system has on the quality of life for the entire community, the Hamilton County Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) was created in January 2007 to evaluate, monitor, and make appropriate recommendations on policies and procedures that promote public safety, reduce recidivism, and improve efficiency and cost effectiveness. The Reentry Subcommittee of the CJC issued the “Hamilton County Reentry Coalition Strategic Plan” in January 2010. In March 2011, based on the recommendation of the CJC, the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners established the Office of Reentry and hired its first Director, DeAnna Hoskins. The Office of Reentry provides a point of coordination, knowledge sharing, and advocacy for successful reentry. Given the splintering of reentry services among multiple agencies, the Office of Reentry initiated “Building Bridges to Break Barriers” to create a community-wide, focused, and collaborative response. The kick-off event occurred on August 26, 2011, included over 250 individuals featuring Senator Robert Portman as guest speaker. Subsequently, the Office of Reentry hired a consultant, Elsie Day, to assist with a community planning process that included:

- Fifteen individual interviews to understand/incorporate community views on reentry
- Five community meetings to reach consensus on direction
- Seven Workgroups to review information and develop detailed recommendations
- Five meetings of Workgroup Chairpersons to integrate and prioritize recommendations

The planning process was designed to be inclusive, transparent, efficient, effective, and build consensus; resulting in a comprehensive reentry plan that focuses and guides community-wide efforts to promote successful reentry. In total, 469 individuals participated in some aspect of the planning process including wide-ranging perspectives from representatives of faith-based, criminal justice, social service, health care, and business entities, as well as volunteers and individuals who had personally experienced reentry to the community.

The first community planning session was held on December 6, 2011, including 129 participants addressing:

- The primary barriers to successful reentry
- Strategies to address the basic needs of the reentry population
- Organizations or individuals essential to development of the Reentry Action Plan

The second community planning session was held on January 18, 2012, including 51 participants addressing:

- The target population for the Reentry Action Plan

- The primary concepts to be incorporated into a vision statement
- The principles or underlying values that should guide reentry activities
- Strategies to support successful reentry

The following workgroups were established to develop detailed recommendations:

- Basic Needs
- Workforce & Business Development
- Family & Community Support
- Community Awareness & Training
- Policy Development & Advocacy
- Data & Evaluation
- Sustainability

The third community planning session was held on March 21, 2012, including 19 participants addressing:

- The magnitude and nature of the reentry population and research on the most effective practices conducted by the Data & Evaluation Workgroup
- Draft vision statement and guiding principles
- Draft recommendations from the seven workgroups

Prior to finalizing the plan, it was deemed essential to “test” the ideas with a new audience of individuals who had experienced reentry. Though all sessions included individuals who had personally experienced reentry, the fourth community planning session specifically targeted these individuals to attend the session on April 30, 2012, with participants addressing target population, vision, guiding principles, and strategies that had been developed through the previous community and workgroup meetings. The fifth community planning session was held on May 16, 2012, with participants reaching consensus on the content and wording of the key components of the final plan. Throughout the planning process, Workgroup Chairpersons, the Director of the Office of Reentry, and the consultant met to integrate the recommendations and set priorities. In addition, the Director of the Office of Reentry and the consultant worked closely together to oversee the entire planning process.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Individuals returning to Hamilton County from incarceration benefit from a number of public and private organizations that provide services that are helpful in supporting successful reentry. Some of these organizations have extensive experience and incorporate evidence-based and promising practices in their efforts, and certainly most possess passion and commitment to

create a more robust support system. The Reentry Action Plan is designed to build upon the strong base of services and investment that already exist. The Reentry Action Plan, though, also fills a gap – a focused and coordinated approach that marshals all of the necessary assets and resources in an effective and efficient manner. It is only the first step in a long process of reaching the community vision for reentry. For the next two years, it provides strategic direction, an organizational structure to achieve that direction, and areas that require further planning and development. Patience and persistence is required and a willingness to look beyond individual or organizational interests, concentrating instead on those to be served and the greater community good.

The vision, guiding principles, target population, and strategies in the Reentry Action Plan are a result of the consensus-building planning process conducted by the Hamilton County Office of Reentry. All community members were welcome to join the planning process and those that participated contributed and agreed to these primary components of the plan.

VISION

When setting strategic direction for a group of individuals and organizations attempting to address a community issue, it is important to have developed a vision or an "idealized" view which concentrates on the future and provides motivation and inspiration. The Reentry Action Plan's vision is as follows.

Hamilton County's returning citizens are embraced and supported to become self sufficient, contributing members of a safe and thriving community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Beliefs and values of those working on the Reentry Action Plan have been clarified so that decisions are driven by a common set of principles. Sometimes when complicated, difficult decisions must be made, a review of the guiding principles can help to resolve conflict and lead to an enlightened response. The Reentry Action Plan's guiding principles are:

- *We work collaboratively with all stakeholders to address the individual and system barriers to successful reentry*
- *We offer a holistic service system that emphasizes the establishment of relationships that cultivate hope, dignity, and self worth in returning citizens*
- *Our services are evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and accessible to returning citizens and their family members*

TARGET POPULATION

Though it is recognized that successful implementation of the key strategies in the Reentry Action Plan will benefit many in the community, given the number and breadth of needs of individuals in Hamilton County coping with the challenges around reentry, agreement on target populations provides a required focus. The Reentry Action Plan's target populations are:

Primary:

- Adult and juvenile males and females in Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction prisons returning to Hamilton County with a medium or high probability to re-offend
- Emphasis on those needing assistance

Secondary:

- Family members of those returning to Hamilton County from Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction prisons
- Adults and youth released from other incarceration settings with a medium or high probability to re-offend

PRIORITY STRATEGIES

These strategies are the first steps to move towards realization of the established vision, providing a focus for the efforts of community partners that have needed resources. Fiscal and human resources are limited, and by setting priorities, it is more likely that the desired outcomes can be achieved in the most effective and efficient manner possible. The Reentry Action Plan's three priority strategies are as follows.

Strategy 1: Establish the Hamilton County Reentry Resource Center

- A. Place matters
 1. A safe, central, and accessible downtown location that is close to public transportation and has free parking
 2. A facility that is comfortable and conducive to a range of individual and group activities
- B. A coordinating agency that employs returning citizens and other staff and volunteers that are welcoming, knowledgeable about community resources, and committed to obtaining the assistance requested by the visitor
 1. Electronic connection to 211 and a Reentry Resource Guide
 2. Focus on basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, and financial resources

3. Assistance with obtaining identification and transportation, legal issues, medical needs, telephone/computer use, and employment
4. Socialization opportunities
- C. A range of agencies offering key services on a scheduled basis eliminating the need to travel to multiple providers at various locations in the county
- D. Opportunities for visitors to join the center and becoming involved on an ongoing basis, including joining a mentorship program
- E. Outreach efforts to publicize the center to returning citizens and their family members; agencies that serve the reentry population so that they refer their clients and utilize the center to provide their services; and neighboring businesses to create a sense of community

Strategy 2: Strengthen Pre-Release Services

- A. Expand, coordinate, and leverage faith and community-based programming to increase accessibility to those in prison that address a range of needs such as job readiness, housing, cognitive behavior interventions, etc.
- B. Strengthen families
 1. Create children of incarcerated programming
 2. Provide training to incarcerated parents such as Fathers Matter & Every Mother has a Child
 3. Offer family reunification activities
 4. Promote visitation in family-friendly settings and through video visitation at no or nominal cost
 5. Modify child support orders to prevent arrearages
- C. Establish a Pre-Release checklist to be completed by ODRC prior to release
 1. Apply for birth certificates and social security cards
 2. Identification exchange between ODRC and BMV
 3. Drivers license testing
 4. Medications and follow-up appointments
 5. Video court hearings to address warrants (Child Support & others), old charges, and driver's license suspension, etc.
 6. Provide health, mental health, and program participation record
 7. Circulate Hamilton County Reentry Resource Guide

Strategy 3: Develop Workforce and Expand Employment Opportunities

- A. Establish Business Leadership Council
 1. Develop and implement hiring practices that promote inclusiveness
 2. Provide on-going support and advice

- B. Improve employee/employer relations
 - 1. Increase employer participation in existing hiring incentive programs through education and strengthening current hiring incentive programs promoting ease of use for employers and clients
 - 2. Provide education, training, and support for businesses so that they readily see the value in hiring returning citizens
 - a. Access to trained, motivated, work-ready labor pool
 - b. Recognize companies (i.e. a special designation, positive public relations campaign through United Way focusing on how inclusive employers strengthen families and communities)
 - c. Clarify risk/liability (protection from discrimination lawsuits)
 - 3. Support employers in employee retention
 - 4. Develop relationships with unions – open shops, help with dues, apprenticeships
- C. Create additional alternative and transitional work and training opportunities
 - 1. Develop paid and unpaid co-ops, internships, and volunteer opportunities with local businesses, allowing individuals opportunities to develop work skills and broaden knowledge base of careers
 - 2. Promote social enterprise ventures which create jobs for returning citizens; support entrepreneurial micro businesses started by returning citizens; create a tool kit with resources and training
- D. Enhance job readiness programming
 - 1. Raise awareness of validated assessment instruments; develop a “tool kit” of appropriate assessments based on the relevant population
 - 2. Develop an evidence based, best practice tool kit for job readiness classroom curriculum
 - a. Basic work skills (attendance, punctuality, appearance, work relationships)
 - b. Job search skills (networking, resume development, applications, interviewing, answering questions about background)
 - c. Computer skills
 - d. Criminal thinking/behaviors and impact on employability
 - 3. Create on-going support system
 - a. Implement a system of rewards/positive reinforcement for participants, including certificates of completion
 - b. Create opportunities for coaching through transitions and regular alumni activities
 - c. Create a funded position with Super Jobs Center
- E. Institute a quarterly provider forum to enhance collaboration and communicate new information, address challenges, promote cross-referrals, and build trust

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

There are several other areas that were identified as components of a comprehensive approach to reentry, but require further development and a community discussion that allows for input and consensus. Preliminary ideas in each area are as follows.

- A. Housing
 - 1. Create a range of appropriate and affordable housing options
 - 2. Develop a support system for private landlords
- B. Health and Wellness
 - 1. Understand and prioritize mental health, substance abuse, and health services
 - 2. Conduct thorough and accurate assessments of need, especially mental health
 - 3. Make existing resources more accessible
- C. Community Awareness and Support
 - 1. Develop positive messages and use varied methods to communicate these messages
 - 2. Develop a peer mentoring network, providing training, awareness and character development, as well as support group meetings for individuals affected by the criminal justice system
 - 3. Establish four Citizens Circles
 - 4. Create a system of support for the children and other family members of individuals returning to the community from incarceration

IMPLEMENTATION

It is a significant achievement to have developed the Reentry Action Plan through a community planning process and a public release of the plan is merited to recognize the efforts of those who participated and inform the larger community. Moving to implementation quickly with immediate accomplishments is essential to sustain the investment of those already involved and to engage others to obtain their participation and contributions. Immediate actions areas to be completed by the end of 2012 are as follows.

Action Area 1: Create an infrastructure to implement Hamilton County Reentry Action Plan to achieve a focused and coordinated approach that marshals all of the necessary assets and resources in an effective and efficient manner

- A. Supplement staff of Office of Reentry
 - 1. Clerical Specialist
 - 2. Development & Contract Compliance Officer

3. Community Liaison
- B. Create community partnership structure
 1. Leadership Council, which oversees all of the following committees
 2. Policy & Legislative Advocacy Committee
 3. Workforce & Business Development Committee
 4. Service Planning & Development Committee
 - a. Pre-Release Services Workgroup
 - b. Reentry Resource Center Workgroup
 - c. Housing Workgroup
 - d. Health & Wellness Workgroup
 - e. Community Awareness & Support Workgroup
 5. Funding & Sustainability Committee
 6. Quality Improvement & Evaluation Committee

Action Area 2: Establish Hamilton County Reentry Resource Center

- A. Identify and renovate facility
- B. Finalize detailed program design
- C. Select a coordinating agency

Action Area 3: Strengthen Pre-Release Services

- A. Identify ODRC staff member and Hamilton County representative to take lead
- B. Obtain all relevant ODRC policies and procedures

Action Area 4: Develop Workforce and Enhance Employment Opportunities

- A. Establish Business Leadership Council
- B. Conduct research on model hiring practices that promote inclusiveness

Action Area 5: Create Reentry Resource Guide

- A. Engage 211 in development of guide
- B. Gather and review other guides

Action Area 6: Raise funding to begin implementation of priority strategies

- A. Develop budget
- B. Identify funding currently available
- C. Obtain preliminary commitment of funds by June 2012 release of plan

As progress is made on implementing the Reentry Action Plan, a structured system of reporting and refinement will be instituted. With the public release of the plan occurring in June 2012, an open community session will be held in January 2013, and annually thereafter, to update stakeholders on progress and provide an opportunity for input.

For more information please contact:

DeAnna R. Hoskins

Reentry Director

Hamilton County Administration

Office of Reentry

138 E. Court Street, Room 101

Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-1226

deanna.hoskins@hamilton-co.org