

## Municipal Action Guide

### Reducing Gang Violence Through Reentry Services

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#### The Challenge

Growing numbers of formerly incarcerated people are being released after serving time in prison, jail, or other correctional facilities. As these individuals return to the community, they must overcome a number of significant challenges that include finding housing and work in a harsh economic climate; limited employment skills and educational attainment; and the stigma of a criminal record. They often have multiple service needs such as mental health or medical conditions or a history of alcohol or substance abuse addiction. While some may have the support of family or friends, others are isolated, making them even more vulnerable.

The risk of recidivism is extremely high, particularly for those with ties to local street gangs. Many gang-affiliated individuals have witnessed serious criminal activity from a very young age and may never have successfully integrated into mainstream society. Years of incarceration in adult and juvenile correctional facilities can cement social relationships and behaviors that contribute to continued patterns of crime and violence. Re-establishing ties to a street gang network upon release presents immediate access to shelter, psychological support, and economic stabilization, particularly when coupled with the personal barriers of limited education, lack of formal job training and experience, and few alternative positive social influences. Successful reentry programs therefore need to address these needs to provide a viable, sustainable alternative to returning to gang membership.

#### Strategies

The first moments after release are some of the most crucial in the reentry process, particularly for gang-affiliated individuals. Thus, reentry services are a critical component of a comprehensive gang violence prevention strategy to stem the cycle of repeated crime and incarceration and help formerly incarcerated people make a successful transition back into the community. A continuum of post-release programs and supports

#### Trends in Incarceration and Release Rates in California

- The California prison population has grown significantly over the past 15 years (73% since 1990). *Public Policy Institute of California, 2006.*
- The incarceration rate in California is 3% higher than the national average (460 inmates per 100,000 compared to 447), but the parole rate is 28% higher (438 parolees per 100,000 compared to 315). *National Institute of Corrections, 2008.*
- Approximately 135,000 prisoners are released from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) every year. *CDCR, 2009.*
- Recidivism rates are increasing. A significant number of California prison admissions (67% in 2005–2006) are individuals returning for new crimes or parole violation as opposed to new offenders. *CDCR, 2010.*

offers an alternative path that not only improves individual outcomes but may also have a positive impact on overall gang membership and activity in a given community.

A number of promising practices are emerging as cities across the country develop multifaceted reentry and rehabilitation programs. These initiatives provide former inmates with essential day-to-day necessities like housing, medical care, and emergency assistance and link them to educational opportunities, job training and placement, and mental health and substance use counseling. Coordinated case management services help monitor and track individual progress and offer support and assistance over an extended period of time.

Using former gang members as outreach workers to assist recently released prisoners in avoiding future violent behavior is another strategy showing some success. Some localities, notably Chicago, have employed a “carrot-and-stick” concept that combines reentry support services to incentivize productive,

law-abiding behavior with a series of increasing punishments for additional offenses and gang-related crimes in order to discourage future criminal activity.

This paper explores two examples of innovative reentry strategies in California and offers some lessons learned for other localities to use in developing their own reentry services.

#### **San Diego County Prisoner Reentry Program**

<http://www.sdcca.org/office/sb618/index.html>

San Diego experiences some of the highest recidivism rates in the state, and the County Prisoner Reentry Program uses evidence-based practices to provide reentry support for nonviolent offenders. A key component of the voluntary program is that transition support begins before release. A strengths-based assessment that considers each individual's needs and risk factors is administered by the county probation department at sentencing. At that time, the Sheriff's Department also conducts an assessment of personal health, including mental health and substance abuse issues, as well as educational history, job skills, and work experience.

During incarceration, the probation department works with each individual to develop a "life plan," which outlines the steps necessary for that individual to make a successful transition back into the community upon release. Participants are offered access to a variety of programs to help them meet their goals, including vocational training, life skills and parenting workshops, anger management counseling, spiritual development, and numerous educational assistance programs. Six months before release, each inmate meets with his or her assigned case manager, probation officer, and community case manager to discuss progress on his/her life plan and aftercare needs. This care coordination group provides regular support after release as well monitoring each individual's progress.

At release, the community case manager meets the inmate, takes him or her home, and is on call for support during the first 72 hours. Case management continues for the first year and is available for six additional months of support as necessary. Release benefits include placement assistance with residential treatment, family reunification, child support guidance, gang-tattoo removal, and mental health counseling.

The San Diego Associate of Governments (SANDAG), a research and public policy advisory council, monitors the program by checking in with participants four times over the course of their involvement. SANDAG tracks a number of program outcome variables, including recidivism rates, parole violations, improvements in individual risk factors, services rendered, and overall satisfaction.

The reentry program has garnered substantial funding from state agencies and major private foundations. In addition, the San Diego model has been used as a policy template for many

## **POLICY OVERVIEW**

### **PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**

Noting the connection between well-designed reentry programs and decreased recidivism rates, federal and state governments have prioritized reentry as a crime and violence intervention strategy and have launched a number of new initiatives to support the development and implementation of local programs.

The OJP Reentry Initiative serves as the central clearinghouse of federal information about reentry initiatives and links to state resources and contacts. The Initiative is a collaborative among multiple federal partners that have come together to provide resources and funding to states and cities. Federal partners include the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

### **FUNDING**

- The Reintegration of Ex-offenders Adult Program (RExO), a program of the Department of Labor, offers funding focused on employment/job training, housing, and mentoring.
- The Second Chance Act is a piece of federal legislation signed into law on April 9, 2008, designed to make federal grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations with the goal of supporting substance abuse treatment, housing, employment, training, and other services to help lower recidivism. In 2010, the Second Chance Act awarded over \$100 million for local and state reentry demonstration projects, mentoring, and other transitional services provided by community-based organizations, reentry courts, and research and evaluation of programs and strategies.
- The CDCR maintains the Inmate Welfare Fund that provides funding for reentry planning and implementation in localities across the state.

individual laws and budget proposals at the state level, including the “Recidivism Reduction Act,” which focused specifically on employment for formerly incarcerated individuals.

**The Reentry Council of the City and County of San Francisco**  
<http://sfreentry.com>

The Reentry Council is a local advisory body of key stakeholders that coordinates reentry information sharing, planning, and engagement activity in San Francisco. Its mission is to help formerly incarcerated individuals live peacefully and lawfully, achieve self-sufficiency, engage in positive social interactions and relationships, and attain physical and behavioral health. The council targets adults being released from San Francisco County Jail, juvenile justice out-of-home placements, CDCR facilities, and U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons institutions.

The 21-member council is chaired by the mayor’s office, the public defender, the district attorney, and the sheriff. The council includes representatives from the police department, adult probation, and non-criminal justice partner organizations in the areas of health, human services, economic development, and child support. A third of the council’s members are formerly incarcerated. There is one dedicated full-time staff person from the public defender’s office, funded by the City and County of San Francisco. Additional staffing is funded through grant dollars to support the development of the California Reentry Council Network (CRCN).

An extensive website and comprehensive online resource guide is available to assist individuals reentering the community. The resource guide includes sections on probation and parole, housing, education and employment, health and treatment options, supportive services, family and child considerations, and legal and advocacy issues. It offers checklists and explanations to help facilitate the reentry process and provides worksheets to assist individuals in planning their transition.

The council helped San Francisco obtain significant federal Second Chance Act funds for five demonstration projects in 2009–2010, including a partnership with local community-based agencies to provide substance abuse treatment for formerly incarcerated individuals with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health problems.

## Action Steps

The San Diego and San Francisco strategies offer city leaders a number of relevant principles of practice to consider when developing a comprehensive reentry services strategy for gang-affiliated individuals.

**1. High expectations:** At the most basic level, a reentry program must set a high standard for success, both for the system providers planning the initiatives and for the formerly incarcerated individuals who will use the program.

**2. Involvement of the formerly incarcerated:** Including formerly incarcerated individuals in planning and implementation of reentry initiatives ensures that their voices are represented and that services are culturally relevant for those returning to the community.

**3. Multi-agency collaboration:** Comprehensive, multi-agency reentry planning and action models that consider local needs and capacity can help reduce gang violence. Broad participation and support is a critical component, as are trust-building and clear communication channels among partner agencies and criminal justice system groups. Regular meetings are an important strategy to allow for discussion, brainstorming, and consensus on the best direction of the program. Involving non-criminal justice system entities in the process, such as housing, social services, faith-based organizations, behavioral health, and workforce development providers, ensures that policies and protocols reflect the multifaceted nature of reentry requirements.

**4. Structured oversight and supervision:** The leadership and participation of top county officials is vital to the success of the planning and oversight of a reentry program. A successful reentry effort also requires a coordinated, organized coalition and a dedicated staff to manage the project and keep it moving forward.

**5. Multi-faceted, intensive services:** The formerly incarcerated share a number of common needs for support that must be addressed by any reentry program. Post-release services should begin during incarceration and continue for an extended period of time (from 3–12 months) after reentry to assist individuals in their transition. The best practice is to encourage organizations to offer programs in correctional facilities and then follow individuals with services and support as they return to the community.

- **Employment:** Finding a job is the single most important concern for newly released individuals, and one of the key factors in reducing recidivism. (One study reported that 75% of inmates believed that securing stable employment would help them stay out of prison [Kim, 2009].) Obtaining a job and receiving a steady paycheck not only provide a source of financial support and consistency, but enable debt repayment and child support remissions. Pre-release services can help individuals plan for employment and incentivize employers to hire the formerly incarcerated.
- **Behavioral health:** More than half of all California prisoners in 2004 reported suffering from drug dependency (Mumola & Karberg, 2006). During the reentry transition, treatment-based supervision produces better outcomes than focusing on drug use violations alone. Given the close correlation between substance abuse and mental health problems, integrating treatment for co-occurring disorders is a best-practice approach. The Reentry Policy Council has developed a series of recommendations for behavioral

health services that include ensuring cultural competence among service providers, asking the formerly incarcerated to help in the design of the service plan, and providing a system of medication follow-up to manage compliance.

<http://reentrypolicy.org/Report/PartIII/PolicyStatement33>

- **Medical care:** Emerging research suggests that programs offering continuous health care from prison through parole can reduce recidivism (Mulmat, Burke, Doroski, Howard, & Correia, 2009). Both Rhode Island and Massachusetts have implemented models that use the same community-based health providers during incarceration and release to ease access barriers during reentry. While this arrangement can be difficult for a number of logistical reasons, considering innovations that ensure access to medical care and wellness services is an important component of a comprehensive reentry initiative.
- **Housing:** Homelessness is a common problem for the formerly incarcerated, and those without stable housing are at higher risk for reoffending (Reentry Policy Council, 2005). An important part of the pre-release process is assessing housing status. For many people, returning to their families may not be a viable option, yet placement in community housing programs is often difficult given criminal record restrictions. Release planners should work with local community-based housing providers and social service organizations to assess the individual's needs and create an individualized housing plan. The Reentry Council has drafted a series of policy recommendations for how to integrate housing into the transition plan and increase the supply of housing stock available in the community. <http://reentrypolicy.org/Report/PartII/ChapterII-D/PolicyStatement19>
- **Education:** The link between educational status, employment, and income is well-documented, and research shows that the formerly incarcerated are significantly less educated than the general population. Numerous correctional education programs exist to increase basic skills, literacy, and degree attainment for individuals during incarceration. These programs are most effective when they are linked to employment or continued educational opportunities post-release. Collaboration between corrections, probation and parole, educational institutions, and employers helps create a pipeline into the community. Case support and life planning provide important guidance and support tools for reentering individuals, particularly since funding is often the biggest barrier to continuing education despite available financial aid. The Urban Institute and John Jay College of Criminal Justice hosted a roundtable on reentry and education in 2009, and published a monograph of the proceedings, which outlines best practices, directions for the field, and the current landscape

of educational opportunities for incarcerated and newly released individuals.

[http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/Roundtable\\_Monograph.pdf](http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/Roundtable_Monograph.pdf)

**6. Reentry planning:** Beginning the reentry transition before release is an important step, particularly for gang-affiliated individuals who are pulled to return to their gang network. The first 72 hours are the most important in the reentry process, and specific attention to support and services during this time is critical. Successful programs will provide the same benefits for recently released inmates as the gang offers. Combining a range of service incentives with a specific set of clear sanctions/punishments in the reentry protocol shows promise in reducing overall gang-related crime in the community.

**7. Multidisciplinary reentry support:** Creating a team to support the formerly incarcerated is an effective way to administer post-release services and ensure that the reentry plan is working. A coordinated case management approach might include routine meetings among a community case manager, parole officer, spiritual advisor, vocational trainer, and other service providers.

**8. Assessment tools:** Using individual assessment tools to understand personal risk factors and assets as early as the time of sentencing can provide a baseline to help prepare offenders for their reentry and to track progress toward individual goals over time. The Minnesota Department of Corrections pre-release handbook includes planning worksheets, assessment questions, and available resources to help with the transition planning process.

<http://www.doc.state.mn.us/publications/documents/Pre-ReleaseHandbook-FinalDraft2010-01.pdf>.

**9. Data collection and evaluation:** Evaluation is an important step to ensure that a reentry program is having the intended impact and meeting the needs of those involved. Actuarial-based instruments are useful for assessing individual risk and needs prior to release, creating a pool of useful data to track and report individual and program outcomes. Web-based data management systems are effective in monitoring each participant from the beginning of the reentry program through completion. The Correctional Assessment and Intervention System™ (or CAIS, used for adults) and the Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System™ (JAIS) are two examples of data collection and outcome-management systems for the reentry population.

## Resources

A number of national and statewide organizations are focused on the issue of prisoner reentry, and a variety of resources offer best-practice information, data and evaluation findings, and successful models that city leaders may find useful in designing local reentry initiatives.

### CA Cities Gang Prevention Network

<http://www.ccgpn.org>

The first of its kind in the nation, the CA Cities Gang Prevention Network is a collaborative effort between the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families to combat gang violence and victimization in 13 major California cities. It focuses on identifying and publicizing successful policies and practices that interweave prevention, intervention, and enforcement. The project's website houses many downloadable publications as well as several model strategies for comprehensive gang prevention. "Preventing Gang Violence and Building Communities Where Young People Thrive," an NLC/YEF Institute publication, is a "toolkit" for municipal leaders that contains a section on facilitating reentry from detention facilities.

[http://www.ccgpn.org/Publications/IYEF\\_CCGPN\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.ccgpn.org/Publications/IYEF_CCGPN_Toolkit.pdf)

### OJP Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry/welcome.html>

The Office of Justice Programs maintains a clearinghouse of information on federal and state government reentry initiatives, policy directives, and funding opportunities.

### National Reentry Resource Center

<http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org>

A project of the Council of State Governments Justice Center, the National Reentry Resource Center provides education, training, and technical assistance to states, tribes, territories, local governments, service providers, nonprofit organizations, and corrections agencies working on prisoner reentry.

### National Reentry Research and Policy Library

<http://www.reentry.net/library>

Organized by Reentry Net (a project of the Bronx Defenders and Pro Bono Net), the National Reentry Research and Policy Library include a searchable online database of academic research, evaluations of programs and initiatives, and policy reports on the full range of issues that affect the reentry community.

### Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign

[http://www.outreachextensions.com/portfolio/view/reentry\\_national\\_media\\_outreach\\_campaign](http://www.outreachextensions.com/portfolio/view/reentry_national_media_outreach_campaign)

The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign is a multimedia outreach initiative that focuses on the reintegration of individuals leaving prison and returning to their communities. It provides a range of media resources to expand public awareness and dialogue, and works in partnership with diverse organizations engaged in local initiatives.

### The Prisoner Reentry Institute

[http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/centers/prisoner\\_reentry\\_institute/2704.htm](http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/centers/prisoner_reentry_institute/2704.htm)

Housed at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the mission of the Prisoner Reentry Institute is to spur innovation and improve practice in the field of reentry by advancing knowledge; translating research into effective policy and service delivery; and fostering effective partnerships between criminal justice and non-criminal justice disciplines.

## Examples of Other Local Reentry Efforts for Gang-affiliated Former Inmates

- The city of San Bernardino is working to implement CREST (Community Reentry Education, Employment Service, and Training), a coordinated effort between government agencies and private organizations to provide evidence-based programming to ensure positive parolee outcomes. The CREST Service Center will be a one-stop shop for parolees, with services ranging from employment to housing. The city has also conducted a study regarding parolee needs and best practices in collaboration with CSU–San Bernardino and the Center for the Study of Correctional Education.
- Chicago's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) uses offender notification forums (required group meetings for gang-affiliated parolees that offer access to services and outline a series of punishments for gang-related and felony crimes) coupled with a range of aftercare support services for former inmates. A 2005 study by the University of Chicago and Columbia University Law School evaluated the program and determined that the homicide rate declined by nearly 40%.
- Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI) is a partnership between the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department, the Boston Police Department, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and the District Attorney to create an interagency support system for newly released offenders. Mentoring, information sharing and resources, substance abuse treatment, and employment opportunities are part of the multifaceted approach.
- YouthBuild is a community-development program operating in 45 states that works to address issues affecting low-income youth ages 16–24 and their communities. Many of the youth served are formerly incarcerated and affiliated with local street gangs. The YouthBuild model focuses on reducing recidivism rates, preventing juvenile delinquency, and intervening/preventing gang participation and activity.

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