

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasing Job Readiness and Reducing Recidivism among People Returning to Palm Beach County, FL, from Prison and Jail

Findings and Recommendations from the Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies (IRES) Pilot Project

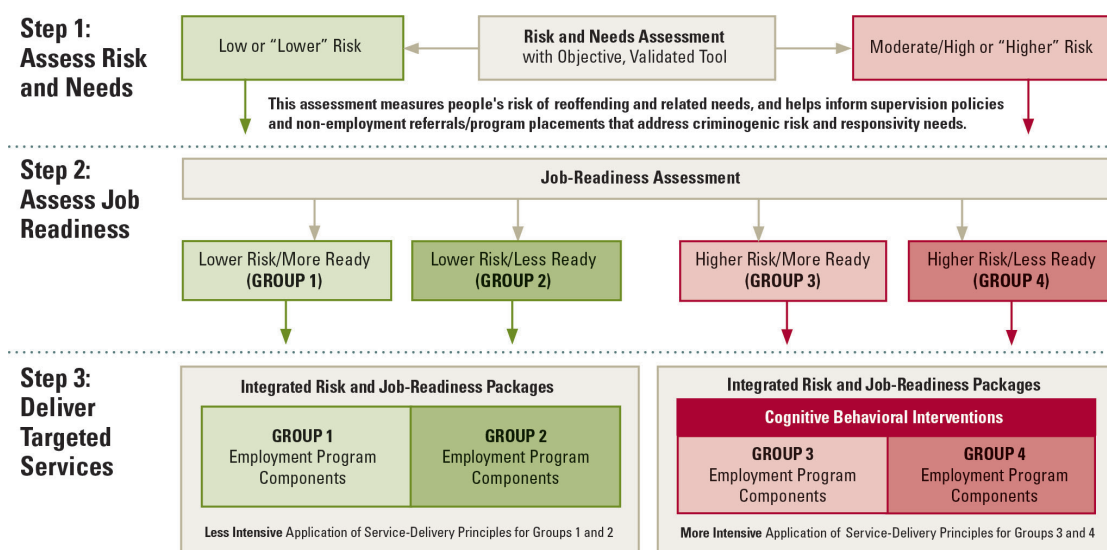
Overview

Every year, more than 3,500 people return to Palm Beach County, FL, from 56 state prisons and 2 county jails.¹ Local policymakers recognize the importance of employment as a key aspect of successful reentry. They also recognize that the needs of this population are complex, and simply placing people in jobs is not a silver bullet for preventing reoffending. Although there is a foundation of research on effective strategies for both reducing recidivism and engaging hard-to-employ adults in the workplace, these efforts are often implemented on parallel tracks with limited coordination. To help people with criminal histories avoid reincarceration and succeed in the workplace, employment programs must move beyond traditional workforce services and address the individual's underlying attitudes that make them both more likely to reoffend and to have problems getting and keeping a job.²

In early 2015, Palm Beach County, FL, was selected by The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center³ and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) as one of only two sites in the country to pilot an innovative approach to reducing recidivism and increasing the employability of people returning to Palm Beach County from prison and jail. The Palm Beach County Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) is leading the effort, in partnership with the county workforce development board, community-based reentry service providers, the Florida Department of Corrections (FL DOC), and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office (PBSO). This site was chosen due to these agencies' committed leadership and mature infrastructure, as well as the strong collaboration between reentry service providers in the community. The project is supported through a public-private partnership between the U.S. Department of Justice and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor.⁴

The Palm Beach County IRES pilot project focuses on operationalizing a level of cross-systems coordination among corrections and workforce agencies on a scale rarely seen in the field. The project is guided by a steering committee that includes stakeholders from both the corrections/reentry and workforce development fields.

Figure 1. The Resource-Allocation and Service-Matching Tool



The **Resource-Allocation and Service-Matching Tool** draws on research demonstrating that not everyone has the same likelihood of recidivating, and those at higher risk to reoffend require cognitive behavioral interventions to address underlying criminogenic needs. Similarly, people who are less job-ready need different services than those who are more job-ready. Although this is intuitive, in practice it is common for agencies to offer a one-size-fits-all program approach.

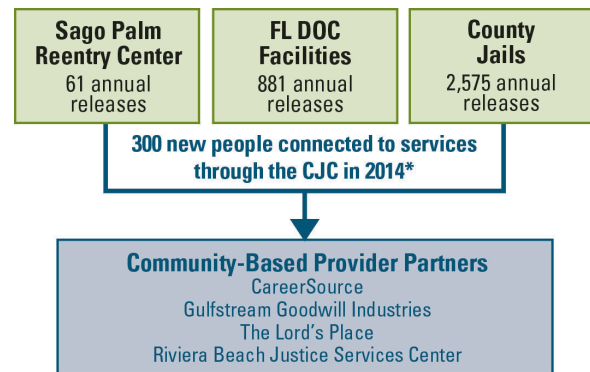
The approach pursued in this pilot project is based on the *Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies* white paper, which was published in 2013 by the CSG Justice Center to help corrections, workforce, and reentry practitioners navigate the complex issues related to coordinated planning and service delivery.⁵ The white paper introduced the Resource-Allocation and Service-Matching Tool, which is an integrated framework that allows the workforce development and corrections systems to triage their scarce resources and tailor service delivery in ways that reduce reincarceration and improve employability for their shared population. [See Figure 1]

About This Project

Palm Beach County is experiencing job growth across nearly all industries, making it an ideal jurisdiction for piloting an approach to matching people returning from incarceration to appropriate workforce services.⁶ In 1988, the CJC established an innovative model for identifying, assessing, and enrolling people who are at a high risk of reoffending into employment programs pre- and post-release that has evolved and improved over time.⁷ The CJC provides workforce services to the adult reentry population through contracts with three community-based reentry service providers (Gulfstream Goodwill Industries, The Lord's Place, and Riviera Beach Justice Services Center) and a partnership with the county workforce development board (CareerSource). For the purposes of this project, the focus is on the adults returning to Palm Beach County from FL DOC facilities and county jails who enroll in workforce services through the CJC (about 300 adults per year). [See Figure 2]

The theory being tested is that by applying resources based on a risk and job-readiness assessment-driven referral process, recidivism and employment outcomes will improve. Thus, the pilot project has the potential to influence both correctional and workforce programming across the country by providing a replicable framework for organizing systems in a cost-effective way. This report outlines the key findings from analyses and resulting recommendations for systems improvements. The project involved analyzing risk and job-readiness profiles of people returning to Palm Beach County from FL DOC facilities and county jails, understanding the employment programming available through the three contracted community-based reentry service providers and the workforce development board, and identifying FL DOC and CJC processes for assessing both the criminogenic risk and job readiness of people and mechanisms for connecting them to appropriate employment services upon release.⁸

Figure 2. Process for Connecting People to Reentry and Employment Services in Palm Beach County



*** Role of the CJC:**

1. Contract with providers for service delivery
2. Coordinate assessment and referral processes
3. Engage and enroll people in programming pre-release
4. Maintain database to track client outcomes

Key Findings and Recommendations

1. The CJC facilitates a high level of coordination among community-based reentry service providers who administer risk and needs assessments pre- or post-release for people returning to Palm Beach County. While program enrollment is prioritized for people at a high risk of reoffending, not all providers are currently able to deliver services in a way that targets criminogenic risk and need factors.⁹

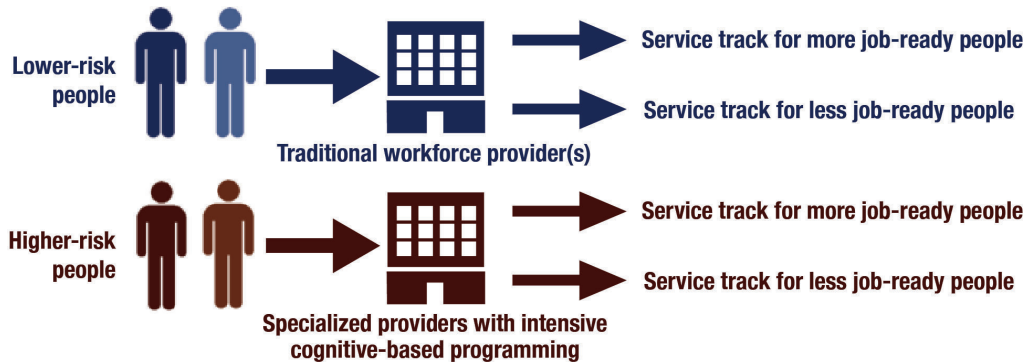
- For people incarcerated at the Sago Palm Reentry Center, a validated risk and needs assessment is conducted prior to release by community-based reentry service provider staff. The CJC mails a risk and needs assessment proxy to all people incarcerated in other FL DOC facilities returning to Palm Beach County to complete and return via mail. PBSO staff administer the risk and needs assessment proxy for people incarcerated in the county jails.
- The CJC refers people assessed at medium to high risk of reoffending to one of the three contracted community-based reentry service providers based on their anticipated address once released from incarceration.¹⁰
- Of the three reentry service providers contracted through the CJC to serve higher-risk people, only one provides targeted employment programming based on risk level that is delivered in a way that addresses underlying needs associated with higher levels of reoffending.
- In early 2016, the workforce development board launched a new employment program in the county jail that is designed to target the needs of people who are assessed as being at a high risk of reoffending.
- People who do not enroll in services through the CJC while incarcerated can also connect with a reentry service provider or the workforce development board upon release; however, that provider may not be best equipped to deliver services based on their assessed risk and needs.

Recommendation: Although the CJC only enrolls people assessed at a high risk of reoffending into programming, a partnership between CJC and the county workforce development board should be formalized to refer lower-risk people who are interested in receiving services.

Recommendation: Assess the capacity of contracted providers to serve higher-risk people, and fund training in recidivism-reduction interventions, when needed. Ensure contracts through the CJC promote evidence-based service-delivery principles.

Recommendation: Refer people to reentry service providers best equipped to meet their criminogenic risk and needs based on assessment results. [See Figure 3]

Figure 3. Recommended Process for Referrals to Service Providers Based on Assessed Risk



Recommendation: Develop protocols for ensuring that people who enroll in community-based services on their own (not through CJC) are connected to the most suitable service provider in the community based on their assessed risk and needs.

2. Workforce programming is not consistently targeted to people's assessed level of job readiness.

- The risk and needs assessment administered by the community-based reentry service providers includes questions regarding a person's education and vocational needs. According to these assessments, 98 percent of people returning to Palm Beach County from FL DOC and county jails who enroll in workforce programming through the CJC have high educational or employment needs.¹¹
- Community-based reentry and workforce service providers have developed their own tools to assess an individual's job readiness; however, there is no consistent definition in the county on what skills are required to be considered job-ready.
- All three contracted reentry service providers and the workforce development board have the capacity to differentiate employment programming based on a person's level of job readiness, but only two target their services accordingly.

Recommendation: In partnership with the business community, develop a standard definition of job readiness.

Recommendation: Adopt a single job-readiness assessment tool to be used by community-based reentry service providers upon intake, and assign people to appropriate programming based on the results.

Recommendation: Develop more programming tracks targeted to people with differing risk levels and needs, particularly for less job-ready individuals.

3. Enrollment rates are highest for people returning from Sago Palm Reentry Center, where community-based reentry service providers begin programming pre-release.

- Of all people returning to Palm Beach County from FL DOC facilities and county jails, only 9 percent (300 people per year) are enrolled in programming through the CJC.
- The highest rates of enrollment (85 percent) are among people released from the Sago Palm Reentry Center, where reentry providers begin the programming pre-release. For other FL DOC facilities, where this in-reach does not occur, the average enrollment rate is only 21 percent. The rate of enrollment is particularly low from county jails, where many people are released too quickly to be engaged by program staff.

Recommendation: Increase enrollment of people being released to Palm Beach County from FL DOC facilities by having FL DOC share risk and needs assessment data directly with the CJC (rather than relying on individuals to respond to a proxy assessment via mailed letter).

Recommendation: Explore opportunities for increased pre-release engagement (such as through video conferencing) of people returning to Palm Beach County from FL DOC facilities.

4. Risk and needs assessment information is collected in a central database maintained by the CJC that is accessible to community-based reentry service providers, but the data collected makes program impact evaluations difficult.

- Five phases of service delivery are used to track an individual's progress in programming (receiving pre-release services, obtaining identification, obtaining and maintaining stable housing, completing treatment, and obtaining and maintaining employment). However, people often do not move through these phases sequentially, making progress difficult to track.

- Program success is defined as completion of all five phases, including maintaining housing and employment for six months, which does not allow opportunities for measuring progress with each phase of programming.
- Information is not regularly inputted by all reentry service providers.

Recommendation: Redefine “completion” as a data tracking tool, and develop standard intervals for reporting.

Recommendation: Ensure consistent use of database among service providers for tracking referrals, assessments, progress, and service delivery.

Next Steps

This report outlines the results of the first year of technical assistance under the IRES pilot project. The project steering committee will guide the implementation of these recommendations over the following year, with continued technical assistance from the CSG Justice Center, supported by BJA, and with guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Labor. A process evaluation will be conducted in the third year of the project to determine if the systems were able to successfully implement the recommendations.

Leaders in Palm Beach County are also working with the CSG Justice Center to engage business leaders in an effort to minimize barriers to employment for people with criminal records and increase hiring opportunities.

Endnotes

1. Data as of 2014: <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/oth/Quickfacts.html>.
2. Extensive research has determined that although a criminal record is a very real barrier to getting a job, providing employment services to someone who is found to be at low risk of reoffending will not translate into a reduced likelihood of recidivism. This concept, commonly referred to as the “risk principle,” holds for all recidivism-reduction interventions, including employment programs. Lower-risk people (i.e., those with few risk factors associated with higher rates of reoffending or violating the terms of supervision as determined by an actuarial assessment tool) are likely to successfully reintegrate upon release without additional services. As such, resources expended on these people will have little added value. Furthermore, placing lower-risk people in intensive supervision and treatment can have adverse effects. Research shows that these programs can increase recidivism rates by disrupting existing social support systems, as well as increase exposure to higher-risk, anti-social people that may influence behavior. For more information on this topic, see E. Latessa (2011), “Why the Risk and Needs Principles Are Relevant to Correctional Programs (Even to Employment Programs).”
3. The Council of State Governments (CSG) is a national non profit, non partisan membership association comprising state government officials from all three branches of government. The CSG Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice informed by the best available evidence on criminal justice topics.
4. The IRES pilot provides \$300,000 in in-kind technical assistance and training for project stakeholders over a three-year period. The two pilot sites selected are Palm Beach County, Florida, and Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, the pilot site lead agencies are the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and Employ Milwaukee (formerly Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board). Federal partners expect the pilot sites to inform the field and national policy on reentry and employment strategies. To learn more about the Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies pilot project, please visit <https://csjusticecenter.org/reentry/the-reentry-and-employment-project/>.
5. To read the full *Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies* white paper, go to <https://csjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Final-Reentry-and-Employment-pp.pdf>.
6. Data as of 2015: <http://www.careersourcepbc.com/LABORMARKETREPORTS.aspx>.
7. The CJC was created by a Palm Beach County ordinance in 1988. It has 21 public sector members representing local, state, and federal criminal justice and governmental agencies, and 12 private sector business leaders representing the Economic Council of Palm Beach County. It has an established history of building strong partnerships to improve the criminal justice system in the county.
8. For more detailed findings, please review the final presentation to the PBC IRES pilot project steering committee, found at <https://csjusticecenter.org/reentry/the-reentry-and-employment-project/>.
9. The *Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies* white paper identifies core components of effective workforce programs for both less and more job-ready participants. For example, less job-ready participants benefit from programming focused on education and training, soft or cognitive-skill development, transitional job experiences, and non-skill-related interventions, while more job-ready participants benefit from non-transitional subsidized employment experiences, job development and coaching, retention and advancement services, and financial work incentives. Additionally, the white paper describes five factors to consider when delivering services based on risk of reoffending: engagement, timing, incentives, coordination, and structured time.
10. LSI-R assessment data represent people who returned to Palm Beach County in 2014 from FL DOC and county jails that enroll in workforce programming through the CJC. From the LSI-R assessment, “higher risk” is defined as a low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high, or high risk score.
11. A “high job-readiness need” is defined as a moderate, moderate-high, or high need score on the education/employment need scale in the LSI-R assessment.

Established by the Second Chance Act, the National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC) provides education, training, and technical assistance to states, tribes, territories, local governments, community-based service providers, nonprofit organizations, and corrections institutions involved with prisoner reentry. The NRRC is administered by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance and is a project of The Council of State Governments Justice Center, in cooperation with the Urban Institute, the National Association of Counties, the Association of State Correctional Administrators, the American Probation and Parole Association, and other key partner organizations. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of The Council of State Governments Justice Center or members of The Council of State Governments.

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