



Issue Brief - 2007

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Inmate Re-entry

Overview

The Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) is responsible for more than 13,500 felons statewide. About 93 percent of all prison inmates will eventually be released from prison and return to our communities.

Statistically, 31 percent of released offenders return to incarceration within three years because of new felony convictions. Called "recidivism," the consequences of repeat offenders are felt by families and communities in terms of public safety and by the criminal justice system, which bears the costs to investigate, arrest, convict and incarcerate repeat offenders.

To keep our communities safe, reduce pressure on the criminal justice system, and to slow the demand for prison beds, DOC strives to shape the kind of people offenders will be when they re-enter society. While they are in custody, DOC works to identify and address inmates' risk factors for future criminal behavior. The goal is to provide inmates with the skills and resources to choose to lead successful lives upon release.

Transition and community reintegration

Oregon has more than 35,000 offenders on felony probation, parole and post-prison supervision. DOC has coordinated transition projects and programs to bring together state and community stakeholders to help the released offenders succeed. Target areas include:

- Appropriate housing.
- Alcohol and drug treatment.
- Mental health care.
- Employment.
- Pro-social connections in the community.

In 2004, DOC reorganized to better align agency operations with its mission and vision. A new Transitional Services Division was created, headed by DOC Assistant Director Ginger Martin. This division ties together the services that directly affect the ability of offenders to transition successfully back to Oregon's communities.

The DOC Transitional Services Division has three sections:

- **Classification and Sentencing** – Offender Information and Sentence Calculation (OISC), and Interstate Compact.
- **Programs** – all programs that target recidivism, including Alternative Incarceration Programs (AIP), education, alcohol and drug, cognitive, religious services, the Children of Incarcerated Parents Project and victims' services.
- **Community Corrections** – relationships between DOC and county-based community corrections agencies, including supervision of those counties that opt-out of the Community Corrections Act.

The Transition Project

In June 1999, DOC formed a transition steering committee comprising DOC employees and members from county community corrections agencies, the Board of Parole and Post-Prison Supervision, law enforcement, a variety of state and local social service agencies, the Oregon Youth Authority, inmate families and victim advocates.

The group first defined "transition" as a process that begins immediately upon entering the criminal justice system through release from prison to community supervision.

More than 300 people representing over 70 organizations have participated in this project toward a common goal: reduce the risk of future criminal behavior. The group's subcommittees and design teams developed detailed plans for initiating and implementing effective, consistent transition-related policies and practices.

Transition plans

Concerted release planning begins approximately six months before release. Each inmate receives a transition plan created by his or her prison counselor and community-based parole officer. It is designed to address on-going criminal risk factors and also includes plans to meet basic needs such as housing and employment.

Regional re-entry prisons

Instead of replicating programs and services at all prisons, DOC found it more effective and efficient to specialize prisons and then assign inmates to those prisons based on individual program needs. Under this new model, some prisons focus primarily on work-based education (job training) and work, while others focus on work plus basic education, treatment and transitional services.

Approximately six months before release, most inmates are transferred to a regional re-entry prison located closest to their communities. Preparation for release is intensified. This time may also include alcohol and drug treatment, if appropriate.

Alternative Incarceration Programs

Alternative Incarceration Programs (AIP) are special prison programs offered by DOC to selected inmates who are at risk of re-offending due to untreated addictions and criminal thinking. The 2003 Legislature authorized the expansion of AIP to include intensive alcohol and drug treatment programs at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and Powder River Correctional Facility. These programs are open only to inmates without mandatory minimum sentences (non-Measure 11 offenders) who are within three years of release.

AIPs have three phases. Inmates who successfully complete the initial six-month residential phase move into the community. Still considered inmates, they are supervised for 90 days of “transitional leave” while practicing the skills and discipline learned in prison. Those who complete this phase are eligible to have their prison sentences reduced. After transitional leave, offenders are supervised by parole officers while completing their post-prison supervision sentences in the community.

Faith-based re-entry programs

Under the leadership of DOC’s Religious Services Unit, hundreds of volunteers and faith-based and community organizations assist communities to reintegrate offenders. These re-entry programs help community members provide offenders with a pro-social support system, develop their spirituality, and role model pro-social attitudes and behavior for the offenders.

Moving beyond traditional government partnerships, DOC’s development of an effective statewide community- and faith-based re-entry initiative is working to:

- Identify community chaplains in each county whose knowledge of resources in their areas make them ideal liaisons.

- Develop links with area churches and organizations including the Ecumenical Ministries of Portland, Metropolitan Alliance for Family Services and the Salem Leadership Foundation.
- Use these contacts to better connect offenders and families to their communities after release and to provide a support network that many offenders otherwise would not have.

The Governor’s Re-entry Council

The Re-entry Council was created by Governor Ted Kulongoski in May 2007. The Council is a statewide collaborative effort to improve the success of inmates’ transitions back into their communities after they have completed sentences. The Council will consist of 21 members ranging from the Governor and the Director of the DOC to Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association. ■

**The mission of the
Oregon Department of Corrections
is to promote public safety by holding
offenders accountable for their actions
and reducing the risk of future
criminal behavior.**



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